



No. 52

N° 52

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 41^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 8 March 2017

Mercredi 8 mars 2017

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 8 March 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 8 mars 2017

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MODERNIZING ONTARIO'S MUNICIPAL
LEGISLATION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA MODERNISATION
DE LA LÉGISLATION MUNICIPALE
ONTARIENNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 28, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise and address Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities.

My colleague the member from Windsor–Tecumseh had an opportunity to speak to this bill about a week or a week and a half ago, and I have to say that he made some very useful commentary on this bill. I thought that as our municipal affairs critic he had gone through and picked out those things that were important, those things that had to be commented on.

I will take an opportunity to go back to some of his earlier comments but I want to note—before I talk about some of the pitfalls or failings in this bill—that there are amendments incorporated in this bill that provide greater power and responsibilities to municipalities to take into account climate change and energy planning in their planning processes. I have to say that this is a useful move on the part of the government. I think that all municipalities, over the years to come, are going to be spending an awful lot more time addressing the energy issues, addressing the climate issues.

I know that here in the city of Toronto a study was done about three years ago looking at the impact of climate change on the city itself. I don't know if any other municipalities have done it. One of the things that, for them, was most startling and most difficult to handle was the realization that the city sewer system would not actually be adequate for future rainfall events, that rainfall that we've seen on a once-in-100-year basis will become far more frequent. Frankly, the city is faced with spending many billions of dollars to upgrade the sewer

system not just to ensure safety of the person, but simply to ensure that basements don't flood on a regular basis throughout this city. The idea that all municipalities will have to start addressing these issues is a good one.

As the legislation is written, there isn't as much about adaptation; it's more about mitigation, about reducing the amount of greenhouse gas that's put into the atmosphere. I think that's good. I think that's a positive thing. I hope that municipalities take advantage of the legislative powers that have been given to them to actually put in place plans to look at energy needs and bring forward programs, regulations and activities that will protect the local environment and, at the same time, protect the global environment.

My colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh talked about a variety of things when he talked about this piece of legislation. One of the things he talked about were the changes in the bill to allow more rapid collection of unpaid taxes.

In the past, municipalities would have had to wait for three years before they could take a property and sell it for unpaid taxes. As my colleague noted, it's now a two-year limit, or will be, once this act is passed.

Oh, you've changed, Mr. Speaker. It's so good to see you.

He notes that municipalities, as you're well aware from your previous experience with municipal councils, have to have a balanced budget. They can't run deficits. Increasingly, as people face financial pressures, their ability to meet their tax payments has been flagging.

My colleague, quite correctly, talked about the fact that this province hadn't addressed the hydro affordability problem as a substantial factor in people's difficulty in meeting their bills and dealing with tax arrears. It will be very interesting to see what happens when this government brings forward its bill on hydro fees, hydro rates.

We in this party have brought forward a plan to deal with rising, soaring hydro rates. We think it's a practical plan, one that doesn't put an undue burden on future generations and one that actually deals with the structural problems that we face here in Ontario when it comes to electricity prices.

The government has brought forward a plan, which is essentially going to Money Mart to borrow large volumes of cash to pay current bills. It's not a sustainable approach. It may be popular, but not sustainable.

My colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh noted that he was seeing more people dealing with tax arrears because in fact they were having difficulty meeting their hydro bills.

The government has responded to the needs and the concerns of municipal governments, because it's saying, "Okay, people can't pay their bills. We'll give you the opportunity to seize their property more quickly and allow you to deal with your financial constraints."

But the government doesn't address the underlying issues, doesn't deal with rising hydro rates and doesn't deal with the change in work in this province. Increasingly, we've been losing those well-paid, high-skilled jobs, and we're becoming a province in which people are working shorter hours. They're more often working part-time, more often working for lower wages and more often working on an unpredictable basis. They don't know when they'll be called in to work or not. Obviously, such people have huge difficulty paying all of their bills, including their municipal tax bills.

My colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh, talking about Windsor, noted that in 2016, about 100 properties were registered under tax lien. In the years before that, we were seeing 200 properties a year, but I'm told he was told by senior officials in the finance department of Windsor city hall that we will see about 1,450 additional properties come up for registration this year. Speaker, that indicates the difficulties that the population is having in meeting its bills, and certainly the difficulty that municipalities have in ensuring that they have income.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh noted that since 1953, the Municipal Act had been updated roughly every 10 years or so. When that happened, there were public consultations held, an opportunity for people who had difficulty with their municipality to say, "Here are changes that we need in the act," and an opportunity for municipal officials, elected and employed, to talk about what was needed to allow municipalities to function more effectively.

But this time, that wasn't the case. The public wasn't asked to come in and speak about the shortfalls in municipal legislation. The public wasn't engaged in any way that was discernible to my colleague and, frankly, discernible to me.

0910

Again, as my colleague said, it would have been fairly straightforward for the minister or members of the government to wander through Tim Hortons in any riding that they were representing and talk to people and at least get some early sense—although that may or may not have happened, it's never a substitute for a proper public consultation process, one that is missing here.

Municipalities are struggling with downloading, downloading that was put in place by Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government. There was about \$3 billion that was dumped on the laps of municipalities. And as you're well aware, Speaker, municipalities have been struggling ever since, dealing with those problems. Here in the city of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing, which is a responsibility of the city of Toronto—a large part of that housing used to be run directly by and financed by the provincial government, and it's now in the city's hands. This government has reduced, on an ongoing basis, support for that housing.

When you talk to those who work with Toronto Community Housing, who are trying to make it work based on the municipal tax base, they find they don't have enough money. Frankly, Speaker, that has meant an ongoing degradation in the level of maintenance of those units and a loss here and there now of units that are no longer habitable, but a great fear that we will start to see the loss of whole buildings. The download that was created by the Conservatives and perpetuated by the Liberals has left cities in a position where they can't actually provide the funding necessary for community and social housing.

Speaker, you also have to know, of course, that selling off our publicly owned Hydro One by this government has undermined the finances of the province as a whole. Hydro One earns revenue of \$700 million to \$800 million a year. By selling off 30% of that asset, we're losing about \$200 million a year. As the Financial Accountability Office has said, that means a long-term reduction in revenue for the province of Ontario and a long-term reduction of our ability, frankly, to fund and support social programs like affordable housing.

Now, that wasn't part of this act, but the failure on the part of the government to protect provincial revenues, to hold on to revenue generators, means that no matter what this act says, it is going to be more difficult for the province in the future to actually provide the services it has to provide and, frankly, to upload expenses from municipalities—something that is going to need to be done if those municipalities are going to remain viable, if they're going to be able to provide the services, the roads, the sidewalks, the police, the fire and the public health services that are needed for modern municipalities.

My colleague also noted that there was a failure in this act to actually give powers to municipalities across Ontario, to increase the range of taxes they could collect, to put them on the same footing as the city of Toronto, and that's a problem. That is a problem because those municipalities, like the city of Toronto, find that the property tax base is not enough for them to actually provide the services that citizens need, but they don't have the wherewithal to reach out more broadly.

"The City of Toronto Act"—I'll quote my colleague—"allows for an alcoholic beverage tax. It allows for an entertainment and amusement tax. Parking levies could range from 50 cents a day for each spot to as much as \$1.50. Toronto has the ability to tax tobacco between 1% and 10%."

Now, my colleague is correct: Very few municipalities in Ontario would actually take advantage of those taxing powers—no question. But as he says, that's not the point. Don't Ottawa, Windsor, Hamilton, Guelph, London, Thunder Bay have responsible governments? Aren't they grown-up levels of government? Should they not have powers that the city of Toronto has to actually deal with their financial difficulties, with their financial responsibilities? I think that my colleague was correct. The Liberals missed an opportunity here. As he says, "They could have slipped that in here as easy as pie." Who

knows, Speaker? Who knows? But when this bill goes to committee—and I have no doubt, given the numbers in this House, that it will go to committee—there may be amendments to deal with some of these outstanding problems in the bill.

My hope, at least if this bill goes to committee, is that there will be broad consultations and that people across Ontario will be made aware that there are hearings and that they will have the opportunity to intervene and speak.

Still, it would have been much better, prior to the introduction of this bill, for the government to have held a consultation process so that people would have that opportunity to say what should be in the bill. It's always so much easier, before the bill is actually committed to the printer, to get those things in. Once it gets here—and it's just our nature; just the kind of people we are—it can be a bit harder to actually change.

This bill speaks as well to the requirement for legislation integrity commissioners. I have to say, I do admire the sense of wit of my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh. He had to say: “Let's talk about integrity for a moment. We all know what that is. Some of us even claim to have a fleeting relationship with it.” I think it was Winston Churchill, talking about Stanley Baldwin, who said that Stanley Baldwin occasionally stumbled across the truth, but when he did, he'd pick himself up and go on as he had before. I think my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh has the same dry sense of humour when it comes to integrity.

As my colleague said, every member of this House has the provincial Integrity Commissioner, that we deal with. Where we falter, where it's brought to the Integrity Commissioner's attention or where the Integrity Commissioner notices, then that commissioner can call on us to address the issues that have come up.

In this bill, existing municipal integrity commissioners will have some of their powers expanded. They will be doing work on code-of-conduct provisions as well as the conflict of interest act. They'll be working with municipalities on procedures for ethical behaviour. There will be an educational component to their work as well.

One thing that my colleague noted, though—and he has a good point—is that the bill allows 180 days as the period of time from the time a complaint is launched against a municipal politician—a councillor or a mayor—before things are addressed. As he says: Why not 30, 60 or 90? If a complaint is launched against a municipal politician and it takes many, many months to resolve that complaint, that person, innocent or guilty, is presumed to have done something wrong by the public. Whether people are right or wrong to assume that is beside the point; it's just simply what happens. My colleague notes, and I think he's right, that having something hang out in the air like that for six months can make it very difficult for a councillor or mayor to function. It makes far more sense to try and expedite that process and resolve those questions as quickly as possible. I think my colleague is right to say that these cases need to be resolved fairly

quickly. The saying is, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” And I think he's right. In this case, that will be an issue, and frankly, in an election year, it can be a huge issue. If someone has an integrity problem, that problem needs to be addressed, needs to be assessed and needs to be ruled on in a rapid basis. Failure to do that is not good for the population as a whole, because people want these things resolved quickly, and it's certainly not good for the politician who is affected.

There's a section in here that requires municipalities to develop policies on the relationship between members of council and the employees of that council. He speculates that this may be related to some complaints about Mayor Bradley of Sarnia.

0920

Mr. James J. Bradley: No relation.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: We have had a disclaimer from a member in this chamber that he is not related, and I accept that disclaimer.

Mayor Bradley is dealing with that issue; the city of Sarnia is dealing with that issue. Whether that issue sparked this piece of legislation or this part of the legislation I don't know, but it does make sense to have a code of conduct so that everyone knows the rules that are in place, so that everyone knows what the safety zones are, what the red lines are.

Also note, Speaker, that there's a new provision for pregnancy and parental leave. I think everyone in this House can support the leave provisions. Clearly, if you don't attend council on a regular basis, at a certain point, council decides that you've given up, but in relationship to pregnancy and parental leave, it needs to be recognized in this society that the current system is not fair to women. We want more women in public life, certainly on municipal councils, and this change is a useful one.

I've just touched on this bill. I appreciate the work of our municipal affairs critic, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, in doing his leadoff and actually doing an assessment of what's before us. I look forward to the debate and the comments from my colleagues. There's no doubt that there needs to be an update to the legislation. Like my colleague, I wish that this update was done in the context of a wide-ranging consultation. Thank you.

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

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for his comments and his remarks. He spent a bit of time talking about or, actually, criticizing the former Conservative government for their downloading exercise. Before I make my comments, it's important to note for people in municipalities who are residential property taxpayers that when we say “downloading,” what we're talking about is that the former government that was referenced by the member was taking work and costs that were formerly borne by the province of Ontario and basically putting them onto the backs of the municipal residential property taxpayer. Where he went off course in his remarks was he implied that we were continuing and perpetuating that downloading exercise when, of course, exactly the opposite is the case.

He went on to talk for a while as well about the city of Toronto specifically when it came to the downloading exercise. Speaker, what I would tell you and what I would tell people right across the province who have all benefited from our uploading exercise, but specifically in the city of Toronto: This year, just on uploading costs alone, the city of Toronto and all the residential property taxpayers in the city of Toronto will benefit from almost \$450 million to \$500 million in uploaded costs that come off their residential property tax base.

In addition to that, the city of Toronto has benefitted from about \$2 billion in gas tax funding since we brought that in. Of course, we've announced that their annual rate will double beginning in 2019, be doubled by 2021. They'll be getting \$340 million every year in gas tax starting in 2019 as that gets doubled. It's quite the opposite of what the member tried to imply when it came to downloading.

We have been uploading. All municipalities across the province have benefitted from that—from \$1.1 billion in 2003 up to \$4 billion in financial assistance for all 444 municipalities in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased to rise to discuss Bill 68. There was a tremendous amount of municipal sector employees and organizations that took time to submit comments to our PC caucus. This bill looks at a number of items that municipalities have requested and this also affects a number of acts, including the Municipal Act, the Planning Act, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, the Building Code Act, the Development Charges Act, the Education Act, the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act and the Forfeited Corporate Property Act. There are many more, including the Northern Services Boards Act.

The committee meetings that will result from this bill moving on: Those committee meetings need to be held throughout Ontario, not just here in Toronto. There are 444 municipal bodies in Ontario—444.

Now here's why this bill needs to travel and be heard. We need to hear from many of these communities. On the same day Bill 68 was introduced, the government also introduced Bill 70. It was what we call an omnibus bill. It had more than two dozen different acts, including, strangely, the Municipal Act was affected.

Not only does this bill affect it, but typical of the Liberals, what they did that week was cut off debate, held a vote at 11:45 in the morning to send that omnibus bill to committee at 1 o'clock that day, and that was it. It ended at 6 o'clock that day. Nobody from the north, nobody from rural Ontario was able to find out about this, scramble and come to Toronto that day. That was typical of what this government did, and that's why we need to have a committee across Ontario.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to contribute to Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation

Act, 2017. Our municipalities, our ridings that we represent are so important. They're such a link to the Legislature as to the legislation that we create that affects our municipalities. One of the things that municipalities talk about is the struggling revenue sources that they have. Their budgets are stretched to the maximum.

I went to OGRA a couple of weeks ago. I met with representatives from the city of London. One of the topics they had that they wanted to talk about was transit. London is embarking on an expansion and improvement of their transit plan. They have submitted their application to the government and other documents that they require in order for the government to approve funds.

They said that the government seems to be favourable, but there's not a definite answer back as to whether or not the funding will be there on the provincial portion. The municipality is going to contribute one third. They're asking the province to contribute, as well as the federal government.

One of the things they mentioned that they were concerned about is that this government said in October 2016, there was a report that they were waiting for in order to finalize some of these discussions and funding proposals. Apparently, at the time, when we met with OGRA, at OGRA, that report hasn't been done. They haven't heard anything. There's silence from the government on that report.

I'm going to maybe approach the Minister of Transportation today and ask him about that report and where that is. If that's the missing link for them to move this project forward for the city of London, I'd like to know that so that I can push this government to get that information and come back with a decision on transit that's so important to our municipality. It will be an income source. It will be a job creator. We need that in London.

Our London is one of the largest cities in southwestern Ontario. We are a leader. Having an expansion and improving our transit will move our city forward.

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

Mr. James J. Bradley: I always enjoy hearing the member for Danforth offer suggestions to this House about legislation coming forward. He wasn't entirely accurate, in my view, in his assessment of the bill, which I expected because he's going to place an emphasis, as a member of the opposition, on that which may not be up to his standards.

I want to tell him that there was extensive consultation that took place. The public consultations ran from June 5, 2015, until October 31, 2015. The government held a number of consultation meetings with municipal stakeholders, including the city of Toronto, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, municipal staff, provincial and local accountability officers, and the ministry met with business stakeholders who expressed an interest in the review. It was a pretty wide discussion that took place with people across the province about what should go in to a bill of this kind.

On the issue of downloading, I'm glad he mentioned it, because sometimes people forget this, that the last time the Conservative Party was in power—or as they're called, the Progressive Conservative Party—they downloaded financial responsibilities to municipalities. Particularly the rural people out there would know some of these roads that were downloaded. Our government made a decision to upload those costs to the provincial level of government so they wouldn't be borne by the property tax, where we felt they should not be borne.

I know that every time a council meets in the province of Ontario, they credit the provincial government for doing this; they thank the provincial government. I can remember, when we were looking at ways to save money to be able to balance the budget, some people suggested, "Why don't you stop the uploading process that's benefiting municipalities, but going on the tax base of the province?" We did not do that, and I think municipalities are better off as a result.

0930

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity. I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the member from Nipissing, the member from London–Fanshawe and the member from St. Catharines for their comments on my speech.

I want to start with the member for St. Catharines. If I wasn't clear enough in my remarks, I will just emphasize that there should have been a broader public consultation, that members of the public who care about municipal issues didn't get an opportunity to be part of those discussions. I think our critic for municipal affairs set that up fairly well in his initial speech. If I did not make that clear enough, I hope that I have with this correction.

I want to note the Minister of Municipal Affairs' comments. When you actually look at the commentary from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, in 2015, they were saying that municipalities were facing a huge tab for operating the social housing that was downloaded to them by the provincial Conservatives and that the province simply had not lived up to its promises to help with that. In 2013, the city of Toronto lost \$150 million in funding from the province for housing and there's been a continued reduction in support for housing in Toronto, which has meant a deterioration of those buildings and, ultimately, a loss of housing.

Similarly, the city of Toronto, but my guess is it's the same with Ottawa, Hamilton, London—those municipalities used to have a very good funding program from the province. Half the operating costs came from the municipality—for the city of Toronto, over \$300 million per year. A promise to increase the gas tax a year after the next election is not an adequate commitment to actually dealing with that download.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: First of all, I'd like to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of

Seniors Affairs. Also, I'd like to say happy International Women's Day to all of the colleagues in the House, to all the women who are watching out there and to all the women who don't have time to watch out there because they're busy with families or their jobs.

As part of this legislation, we are proposing to ensure that elected municipal officials can take time off for pregnancy or parental leave, and it's fitting that on this day we're talking about this. The offices of members of council would not become vacant because of an absence related to pregnancy or parental leave for 20 consecutive weeks or less. The provision would apply to a member who has adopted a child as well. This would ensure that all new parents have access to clear policies and can have a 20-week leave period. I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener Centre, who introduced this policy through a private member's bill, Bill 46. This bill passed second reading with all-party support, and I'm proud to say that it has been included in this legislation.

In schedule 1, section 33 of Bill 68, we are also proposing to ensure that all councils have policies regarding pregnancy leaves and parental leaves for members. This legislation, if passed, would lower barriers to elected office for new parents, including new mothers. There are lots of things that new mothers need to do, whether they have their biological child or whether they have adopted a child. Everyone knows how chaotic and hectic it can be, and that time needs to be special between the mother, the child and the family. This legislation, if passed, as I said, would lower barriers to elected office for new parents, including new mothers. We hope it will encourage more women to enter politics and be at the decision-making tables in local governments.

I also am pleased to see that there is a section about climate change. What's going on south of the border is very scary to me, because what happens there will affect us. Climate change, of course, as we know, is one of the most significant challenges of our time. Its impacts are already being felt in communities across the province, this country and around the world. We've seen an increase in the number of extreme weather events like flooding, tornadoes, more frequent heat waves and more severe episodes of freezing rain. These events can pose serious and costly threats to public safety and infrastructure.

A key part of meeting our climate change goals will include supporting municipal leaders in making changes at the local level. We know that local governments need to have the powers and flexibility to respond to these challenges that their communities are facing. I know that my mayor, the mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman, is supportive of this bill and looks forward to implementing it.

The changes we are proposing focus on better positioning municipalities to do this effectively. We're proposing to give municipalities the clarity they need to pass bylaws related to climate change. They would also have the option to require green standards in the construction of new buildings in certain circumstances. Municipalities would also develop policies to protect the tree canopy that is crucial in increasing climate change resiliency.

When I first moved into the house I'm in now, I was in there two days and, all of a sudden, I looked out the sliding glass doors at the back and heard this awful crack. It was a gigantic machine cutting down the forest behind my home. We have to make sure that, when possible, that does not happen.

I urge everyone to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister responsible for seniors affairs.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by saying that my new title is Minister of Seniors Affairs. With that said, good morning to everybody. I'm very pleased to share my time and speak to Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act.

My colleague did a fantastic job of speaking on this bill. She focused quite a bit on the parental leave and on the climate change piece, so I will focus my comments on the integrity commissioner piece, open meetings and prudent investment.

I do want wish everybody a happy women's day and recognize the MPP from Kitchener Centre for her leadership on the parental leave piece, which, of course, affects both fathers and mothers, but certainly affects mothers and is a big step for women. I'm glad that this bill and that part of the section was spoken to today, given that it's International Women's Day.

I'm really pleased that Bill 68 is proposing that every municipality have a code of conduct and provide access to an integrity commissioner. This would promote a more consistent level of accountability across our local governments. As MPPs, we are all familiar with the Integrity Commissioner and the role of the Integrity Commissioner that we value so much. I think it's really timely that this bill now provides that every municipality should have a code of conduct and an integrity commissioner.

What I really like about the way this proposal is structured is the fact that it recognizes that municipalities have different sizes and different resources. That's why it provides for the option that municipalities would have the option to pool their resources and share an integrity commissioner or hire a commissioner on a fee-for-service model. It's really well structured. The intent is access to an integrity commissioner and some flexibility that allows municipalities to tailor how they would avail themselves of the services of an integrity commissioner. This is something in line with what all modern democracies are moving toward, which is greater integrity and transparency.

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The second piece that I want to speak to is about open meetings: again, keeping in line with democracy and technology that is allowing us to provide for greater transparency in governing. Currently, there isn't enough clarity under the Municipal Act as to which meetings ought to be open to public scrutiny. I'm sure many of us have read in the papers about cases where city councillors may have met and made decisions in what could have been or should have been a public meeting but was not a public meeting. To clarify, the proposed amendment would change the definition of a meeting to apply

to council and local board meetings where a quorum of members is present, and they deal with a matter in a way that materially advances the council's or local board's business or decision-making.

The use of the word "materially" advancing decision-making is really important because that's a word that everybody understands. It's being introduced there to ensure that an informal, casual gathering of four or five city councillors in perhaps a public place or events that they are attending generally as part of their daily lives doesn't turn into public scrutiny if material advance is not being made for the local board's business or decision-making.

The final piece that I want to talk about is giving some more flexibility to municipalities as they conduct their business, and this time it is around where they invest their funds. Under current legislation, municipalities can only invest their funds in a list of eligible investments. There is, of course, good reason for that. These are public funds and it's important that they are prudently invested.

This brings us to the proposed change. The proposed change, if passed, would provide municipalities with the option to invest according to prudent investor standards. What this does is it allows a municipality a slightly broader range of eligible investments but keeps in mind the original intent, which is that all investments are to be prudent.

Taken together, Mr. Speaker, all of these proposed pieces of legislation do one of three things: They either increase transparency or they increase parental rights or—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

I apologize profusely for leaving the word "of" out of your title. Sorry about that.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise on behalf of my residents in Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry.

In my time back in municipal politics, we had a considerable loss of funding from this Liberal government over the years, and each year was just a little bit more gone, a little bit more gone. The farm tax rebate was something that I kind of led a charge on for the county system. Of course, the carrot is out there: "We're going to look at it." Of course, they never do. In our case, it was about \$1 million a year. With a township budget of \$5 million or \$6 million, it's a huge amount of money, as you can see. It's something that—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Yes, Mike Harris took it out, but you promised to fix it. When we went through that election, you promised to fix it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I like it better when she's quiet.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think we forgot. We talk about the downloading, but what Mike Harris did is he up-loaded 65% of our tax base, which went to school boards. When I was back in the municipality, the municipalities agreed with that. It was a neutral change.

We have seen anything but a neutral change since this government came in. We have had lots of promises. They

stood up yesterday and bragged that they were only closing 600 schools. That is not counting the schools they closed four or five years ago through 2020. In our riding, they closed another five or 10 schools back then. So this is not a one-off. This is something that's been going on a little at a time. We look at the unfunding each year. They went through a \$25-million cut per year for four years—\$100 million out of that. So let's not say that the municipalities are better off.

And that doesn't even talk about the downloading that this bill talks about. It's more services. Maybe it's not a cut in money, but what it is is more legislation, more requirements and more costs for municipalities, which are already taxed out of existence.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: While I was listening to the Minister of Seniors Affairs, I couldn't help but think, like the previous member, that there are extensive school closure reviews going on through my riding. There are so many people who come and complain against the school board meetings, about how they are not transparent, and how they use the rules that the government has given them to make sure that the public is shielded from hearing what they have to say and from holding them accountable for the decisions that they make.

There is a group in my riding who wants the Rainbow Board "meeting for what they might do in the future to be held during the public part of the meeting." But, no, the rules say that they can go in camera. What they do is, they have three hours of in camera, where people have to hang around. There is no place to sit at the meeting; there is no place to be part. Then, all of a sudden, they do the public part of the meeting when nobody is around and nobody is allowed to be in, or anything of the sort.

To say that Bill 68 will fix that—no, because they can only enforce the rules that are there. The rules that are there were made by that government, to shield school boards from accountability to the people who elected them and care about keeping their schools open.

Like my colleague from Toronto–Danforth was saying, this bill needs to tour. This bill needs people's input to make it true and real to what their angle is.

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

Mr. James J. Bradley: I was happy that the two government speakers made reference to the financial assistance provided by the government of Ontario to municipalities. Since this government was elected in 2003, we have worked hard to improve the provincial-municipal relationship, and I think that's appreciated by many.

I know that in 2017, municipalities are benefiting from now over \$4 billion in ongoing provincial support, including the uploads of \$2 billion. These are uploads which reverse what the previous Conservative government did when they downloaded those responsibilities financially to municipalities.

The OMPF: \$505 million in unconditional supports to municipalities. That's primarily, and understandably so, in rural and northern municipalities.

The OCIF: \$100 million a year, which will increase to \$300 million a year in 2018-19.

We decided to take a portion of the gas tax—I don't call it the "gas tax." I'll call this fund the "provincial transit fund." We take two cents of the gas tax; that will go to four cents of the gas tax. That has had a profound effect on local transit systems, where the gas tax now is \$334 million to 99 municipalities, including many small, rural and northern communities. That's extremely beneficial to them. It allows them to expand their service and to enhance their service. We see much better buses now, for instance, more environmentally sensitive buses, which operate in a better fashion and have better fuel efficiency.

I'm pleased that the government of Ontario has made those moves in recent years. I commend the members for sharing that information not only with the people of this House but with all those who are watching on television today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we've heard from debate this morning—and there is an opportunity here, where we're opening up the municipal debate and opening up the Municipal Act and the Planning Act, given the very important and significant impact that municipalities have on people in Ontario.

If you look at all the municipalities together, they're spending something like \$53 billion a year on programs and services. There are 444 municipal governments, with decisions being made by 2,800 locally elected officials, decisions that have a tremendous impact on the people in Ontario.

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Brant county is a good example of that, where we've just seen one of the largest annexations of prime farmland in southern Ontario, with the approval, of course, of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Bill Mauro. This deal gobbles up approximately 9,000 acres of prime farmland, with Brantford annexing 6,700 acres and extending services. It enables another 2,150 acres, mostly of farmland, to be available for development.

This is leapfrog development. This is outside the greenbelt, something that we quite ruefully saw happen in the Caledonia Six Nations area about 10 years ago, which was the trigger for 10 years of grief down that way.

We have to monitor this. I know that the National Farmers Union have been tracking these large-scale purchases of farmland by corporations—in the Brant case, corporations based in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister responsible for—of seniors affairs.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: You still got it wrong, Speaker, but it's okay.

Interjection.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Oh, okay. Well, I guess.

It gives me great pleasure to provide some final wrap-up comments. One of the issues that the opposition raised was around the downloading of services. I think it's fair to say, and we can all agree that the evidence is there, that on balance this government has net uploaded more services back to the province of Ontario. The member from St. Catharines actually gave a number: \$2 billion in uploads, and an additional \$2 billion of funding that wasn't there when we first came into government. Not to mention that, down the road, there will be more gas-tax funding. I can tell you that the good people of Mississauga are really, really pleased with the uploading of funding.

Speaking more to this bill, I know that the people of Mississauga will be very pleased with the idea of an integrity commissioner at the municipal level. I also know that the good people of Mississauga will be very pleased that now there's a clear definition and expectation of which meetings by councillors have to be open to the public. These are really important steps when it comes to transparency.

The other thing that this bill does, which I also know is very important to this government, is that we do believe that each level of government has its own jurisdiction, and it ought to be respected. This bill goes some way in, once again, restoring some more powers to municipalities, and greater flexibility in how they go about their business. Overall, I know that the people of Mississauga are going to appreciate this bill.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise this morning to address Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. This is a bill that actually does contain some very positive measures, but it's also full of a few concerning elements. We are pleased that the legislation looks at a number of items that municipalities requested, such as the definitions of meetings, expanding prudent investor rules to all municipalities, and moving the start date of new councils.

The PC caucus is also pleased to see the updates to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, which includes new options for penalties. As servants of the public, elected officials—we believe—must be held to a high standard.

The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario conducted a survey last year stating that 86% of Ontario councils have a code of conduct or are developing one. The municipalities of Chatham-Kent and Leamington already have their own codes of conduct for council. For those municipalities that have resisted adopting a code of conduct, this will in fact make them mandatory. It's a small percentage of stragglers, but it's important to get everybody on board.

Bill 68 also seeks to address the issue of closed-door meetings. By including a clearer definition of what constitutes a meeting, it will make rules easier for the public to understand. Additionally, it will stop the use of informal gatherings of councillors in an effort to get around closed meeting rules.

This is a positive step to increase accountability and transparency, and that's something that I will always support. However, I was saddened to see another section of the bill that would reduce transparency and accountability.

As our critic noted in his remarks, we have some serious concerns about the government's proposal to allow municipal councillors to call in to council meetings instead of attending in person. It's not transparent. That's not accountable. Even Liberal MPPs understand that this is a bad change to make. The last time this government tried to pull off this change, their own members voted it down. They said that it was an accident, but they might have been being modest.

The reasoning given by the government was that it would make it easier for rural and northern communities where weather may prevent councillors from attending meetings. Well, if that's the reason, then why would they extend this change to the City of Toronto Act as well? Are Toronto suburbs considered rural to the Ontario Liberals? Well, it's also worrisome that the ministry was unable to answer the question of whether calling into a meeting would count as an absence. How is it even possible to try to make this change without having an answer to such a basic question?

Specifically, this bill would grant new abilities, meaning that, "A member of council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them, can participate electronically in a meeting which is open to the public to the extent and in the manner set out in the bylaw provided that any such member shall not be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of members is present at any point in time."

What does "participate electronically" mean, exactly? Maybe the next move for this government will be allowing people to Skype into council meetings; or maybe they'll want to let people Snapchat their support during votes. Perhaps this Liberal government will also want to be able to tweet a new tax. Who knows? Maybe they'll eventually try replacing MPPs in the Legislature with holograms.

Here in the Legislature, every single minute of debate is recorded and broadcast in English and in French. They also provide all of the committee meetings. It takes an incredible amount of work each and every day to broadcast the happenings of the Legislature on TV and online. Why do we broadcast everything that is said or done in the people's House? For big ratings? No, we broadcast our words and our actions because it is incredibly important to be open and transparent. Our words and actions matter, and the public has the right to watch elected officials as they meet, if they so choose.

Speaker, the truly ridiculous thing is that the Liberals are working hard to ensure politicians can skip meetings and vote from the beach in Florida. I know it sounds wild, yet here we are in 2017 and electronic petitions are still not accepted by the Ontario Legislature. That really says it all about where their priorities lie. Companies are designing autonomous cars, but in Ontario you can't file a petition electronically. Instead, the government wants

people to be able to vote from the beach in another country—and I say that with a rather perplexed look on my face.

Technology should be used to help people have their say, not to help politicians get their way. That's all I have to say about that.

There are also a few other troubling elements of this bill dealing with election financing. Last year, Minister McMeekin said, "We hope to increase transparency in municipal elections, so we are proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising in order to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and transparent support. This would include setting contribution and spending limits."

Sounds good, right? Well, not so fast. Only a few months later, the same government introduced this bill, which seeks to dramatically increase those very same contributions they previously said they wanted to limit. They would increase from \$750 to \$1,200. This change would mean that fewer, larger donors would be helping to decide crucial elections through large campaign contributions.

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Bill 68 seeks to make a change that would allow municipal staff to access private property with no requirement to ask permission. The bill states: "A municipality may enter on land adjoining land owned or occupied by the municipality, at any reasonable time, for the purpose of maintaining or making repairs or alterations to the land owned or occupied by the municipality but only to the extent necessary to carry out the maintenance, repairs or alterations." It's all about private property.

This would cover routine maintenance and non-urgent repairs. I'm sure that many people would not feel comfortable in their homes knowing that municipal staff can enter at any time without notice for non-emergencies. This is an invasive, overreaching power that could do a lot of harm in the wrong hands.

Bill 68 also dumps new costs onto municipalities while this government cuts the grants they depend on. Specifically, this bill requires municipalities to provide access to an integrity commissioner. This is a positive thing, but the question is, who will pay for this? Not the province, that's for sure.

Although it is helpful that the bill would allow municipalities to share an integrity commissioner with one another to cut down on these extra costs, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario recommended instead that the provincial Integrity Commissioner be the default adviser for municipalities. That would address the concern about extra costs being dumped to municipalities.

Despite some of this bill's positive elements, I cannot support a bill that has the potential to damage our democracy. The removal of transparency and accountability by allowing elected officials to skip meetings and participate electronically will surely lead to some politicians spending more time away from the communities that they are supposed to be serving. It will provide a degree of separation at a time when officials and their constituents should be coming together.

So, Speaker, it's for these reasons that I am unable to support Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, at second reading. We also know that the government has a majority government and of course this bill is going to pass, but I would hope that the minister and those in committee would have an open ear to amendments that we would be bringing forward.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It was interesting to hear the member's discussion on this bill. He talked about the Integrity Commissioner and closed-door meetings, and one of the things that there has been very much interest around is transparency and accountability and openness when it comes to the government. Having some guidelines under that provision of closed-door meetings is needed so that the public feels, when there are those meetings held behind closed doors, that the items addressed are not of a public interest. That's good to see.

I noted here, Speaker—and I wonder if the government side has an answer for me—that the public input was strictly based on email submissions, and my understanding is that this wasn't travelled throughout the province. One of the ministers talked about having an open forum from June 2016 until October 2016. But I'd like to ask the question of the government: Was that strictly for submissions by email or did they actually travel the province and hear from the public? I think that's very important to openness and transparency. Many people prefer to have their presentations done in person. It also talks to the point of where the government is going about voting during municipal decisions. If they are going to use electronic means to do that, maybe now they are using electronic means to do their consultations. I would appreciate some clarity around how they got public input on this bill, and I am looking forward to having that answer.

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

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex for his comments. Speaker, I can tell you that in 1997, when I was elected to Thunder Bay city council, representing Northwood ward for six years, from 1997 to 2003, I think that most people that were municipal officials at that time would tell you that there was a very different relationship that existed between municipalities across the province of Ontario and the provincial government of the day. I don't think that's a partisan comment. I think it's a fact, and I think it's a reason why a lot of people ran for provincial office in 2003. They were not a happy bunch. I include myself in that group. It was certainly part of the decision-making for me in terms of why I chose to run provincially.

When the member was making his comments, Speaker, and some of the criticisms or comments contained in his remarks—I think if you look at it a little closer, you would see that some of the steps we're taking in this legislation demonstrate a respect for the municipal order of government.

He spent a fair bit of time talking about electronic meetings. I think it's important to know that people miss meetings all the time already. This might actually enhance participation. It's important for the public to know that you still need to have quorum before you can hold a public meeting. It will not be considered a meeting unless there is quorum. You can't have more people phone in or Skype in or however it would be done. There has to be a quorum in person for the meeting to occur.

That's one example. It would be enabled by the municipality. They would have to pass a bylaw. We're not forcing it on them, and that ties back to my remarks at the beginning. This is a demonstration of our respect for municipalities as an order of government that has an ability to make their own choices. This is an example of that. They can pass a bylaw to do it, or they don't have to. It would be up to them.

Broadening municipal investment powers is another example. They can't run deficits on the operating side. We're changing the rule to allow them to invest differently to help them perhaps gain better returns, if they so choose, and to be able to sustain themselves more appropriately and better than they already can. Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to rise and comment on the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. Municipal governments, as was said here earlier, spend \$53 billion a year. It's a huge amount of money. When I go back and meet with my six different councils, they all talk about the lack of funds available.

I remember being part of the eastern wardens' caucus back in 2006, and there was a substantial cut in the transfer payments down from the province, at least according to the municipalities. We took that on at the Ontario Good Roads Association and ROMA that year, through asking and putting that question on the floor of the bear pit over and over again; finally, the government relented, because they were embarrassed about it. They talk publicly about all the help, but this was a clear case of a major cut.

So what action do we see this government take? Next year's rules were changed. You couldn't ask the same question twice. So instead of really getting at the root of the problem, they just make it so the next year it can happen seamlessly. And of course that's what has happened.

They talk about the uploading, but what they aren't saying is that, yes, they uploaded \$100,000 of land ambulance this year, but they also reduced the OMPF funding by the same \$100,000, so it's not really a benefit. Unfortunately, if I talk to the city that looks after those services—they would be happy if they had just reduced it by the same amount, but they find they are reducing their transfer payments to their OMPF funding by more than what was uploaded, so they are in a worse place than they were before. It's a serious problem at the municipal level.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Toronto-Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, there has been a fair amount of debate about whether or not there has been a big upload on the part of the province to help municipalities or whether, in fact, the reverse is true.

There is no question, as we're debating this bill, that far more pressing for municipalities than many of the changes that are before us—and I think it's fair to say they are largely housekeeping changes—is the necessity to change the fiscal relationship between the province and the municipalities. My colleagues from the opposition were saying this in their remarks.

Municipalities are paying the freight for social and community housing. They don't have the money to do it, and thus that housing falls into disrepair.

Municipalities are paying the full freight for their transit systems. They don't have the money from the fare box to actually do the work that's necessary. I know this for Toronto with certainty, but I think it applies to Ottawa, London, Hamilton and Windsor. They don't have the money to provide the transit systems that those cities require.

Until there is an actual addressing of the download issue, we aren't going to have municipalities functioning in the way they have to function. We can have 10 versions of this bill come forward, 10 versions with 10 other fixes in it, but as long as the money issue is not resolved, then the municipalities, with whatever other changes happen, aren't going to function the way they need to function.

This government should have brought in more than just this bill. It should have brought in a package addressing the financial imbalance between the province and the municipalities. It should have addressed the municipal difficulty and put municipalities on a much sounder financial footing. They haven't done that. This bill won't do what needs to be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex has two minutes.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to thank the member from London-Fanshawe and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, as well as the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and the member from Toronto-Danforth, for their insightful comments. Whether we agree in full with all comments or not, that will be decided, I'm sure, at a later point in time.

Speaker, when we take a look at this bill—again, it's Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act—there are 13 different acts involved. You might almost call it an omnibus bill.

As the PC caucus, we really did appreciate the municipal sector employees and organizations who took time to submit their changes and to share their submissions with our caucus. That helped to form the basis of our stand pertaining to Bill 68.

I mentioned earlier the fact that people can in fact phone in to meetings and so on. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs commented on that. He's saying

that, really and truly, with regard to electronic voting, people must be personally in the meeting in order to vote, in order for a quorum to occur. I appreciate the clarification that he gave there, but again, he's not forcing a lot of these changes. He said that municipalities will have to perhaps vote and create a bylaw for that themselves.

Again, on this side, our PC caucus is all about openness, we're all about transparency, and mostly, we're also about accountability. That's the important thing.

I'm also glad and pleased to see that Chatham, Kent and Leamington already have a code of conduct. Of course, this is very important for all municipalities to have.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm honoured today to welcome guests from the University of Toronto, students from the U of T—I hope I get all your names right: Claudine Sierkowska; Luis Lopez-Guzman; Sangshin Jung; Venessa Sectakof; Trevor Hume; Spencer Caul; Felix Burns; Sarah Wapner; Spencer Russell; Michael Lo; Andrew Royce; Daniel Cook; Gordon Lam; and Yingshuo Li. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today, page captain Hailey McLeod from the great riding of Algoma-Manitoulin has some family here along with her: Gary McLeod, her father; grandmother Margaret McLeod; and sisters Emily and Lily McLeod. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome to Queen's Park this morning, in the public gallery, students from St. Augustine Catholic High School in my riding of Oak Ridges-Markham.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature the guests of page Luca DiPietro from my riding: his uncle Marco Torelli; and his cousin Vincent Torelli. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I'd like to welcome to the public gallery today Wendy Feldman and her Humber College class on policy research and analysis.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Today we have the francophone young parliamentarians here, and I just want to introduce Charlotte Bouthillette from Newmarket-Aurora and Valerie Chevrier from Stormont-Dundas-South Garry. I was hoping my colleague was going to be here to introduce Valerie.

Congratulations to FESFO, la Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne, pour le Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Also joining us for the francophone youth model Parliament today, from my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, I have Annie Steep from Jeanne-Lajoie and Dorian Pearce from L'Équinoxe.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to also welcome a resident, a youth, from my riding of Newmarket-Aurora, Charlotte Bouthillette, who will be attending tonight's francophone youth Parliament reception. Welcome to Queen's Park, Charlotte.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm not sure if she's in the chamber yet, but I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine and a good friend to many MPPs: Brenda Hodgson from the Ontario Prayer Breakfast. She'll be joining us soon.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour for me to introduce the parents of today's page captain, Rowan Glover. They are Kate and Rob Glover, proud residents of Englehart, Ontario, my hometown.

M^{me} Sophie Kiwala: Je voudrais faire une grande bienvenue à deux étudiants, Alexandra Allain et Nathan Feuillat, de l'école Mille-Îles de Kingston. Bienvenue.

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: J'aimerais accueillir, en mon nom et au nom de tout le monde, les jeunes du Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario, spécialement ceux de ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Orléans, qui sont avec nous aujourd'hui.

Hon. Michael Coteau: In honour of International Women's Day, please help me in welcoming the youth from Black Girls Magazine to the chamber this morning. They are led by the editor, Annette Bazira-Okafor. These young ladies are all writers and journalists for this magazine. They're incredible young ladies and I'm happy they're here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. We're glad you're with us.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today folks from Interactive Ontario, in particular their executive director, Christa Dickenson, who is joining us today in the members' gallery.

I'd like to invite all members of the House to attend, over the lunch hour in rooms 228 and 230, an interactive digital media expo and a reception.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? I have one of my own. In the Speaker's gallery today we have with us Mr. Sultan Ali Al Harbi, the consul general of the United Arab Emirates, the first in the entire Gulf region to have a consulate in Toronto. He is accompanied by Dr. Bourini from the business, trade and media section of the consulate. Welcome to our guests.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Laurie Scott: Happy International Women's Day to everyone.

My question is to the Deputy Premier. Since her colleague the Minister of Education ran away from CP reporter Allison Jones yesterday when asked about school closures, maybe she will answer her question today. How many Ontario schools are under threat of closure?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Happy International Women's Day as well.

I am delighted to be here today to talk about significant improvements in education right across this province. When we took office, only 68% of students were graduating from high school—only 68% of students. We now have exceeded 85%. What I can tell you is that our education system is delivering real results. Our students are doing—

Interjection.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pardon me, Speaker. I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, it's too late. The member from Renfrew, come to order. I'm also going to invite you to not make comments to the people behind me. The convention is ignorance. I would appreciate the tone remaining civil.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, when you measure our education system by the success of our students—which is, I think, a very fine way to measure the success of our education system—Ontario is a world leader. People are coming from around the world to understand what happened here in Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to come to order. I'm doing so with the anticipation—I do not want to move to warnings, but I will.

Carry on. Wrap up, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will address in the supplementary the question that was asked, but what's really important is, our students are rocking.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Back to the Deputy Premier: Yesterday, the Minister of Education said that it's not about the number of schools and said that she wouldn't give an arbitrary number. Well, that's great, because nobody wanted an arbitrary number; they want a real number.

I'll try again. Mr. Speaker, how many schools are under threat of closure? Is it as high as the 600 schools the minister previously identified?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the numbers speak for themselves. Since 2003, we've increased education funding to \$22.9 billion. That's an increase of almost 60% since they were in office, Speaker. And despite declining enrolment, per pupil funding has increased more than \$4,500, an increase of 63%. Funding for rural boards has increased 43% since we took office, despite declining enrolment of 14%.

Since 2003, our government has opened 810 new schools, significantly renovated another 780 schools, and that includes 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario. We build. You—

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

1040

Ms. Laurie Scott: I still didn't get a firm number of how many schools you're closing, but let's talk about

Our Lady of Peace in Vaughan. It is 97% full and it has both an English stream and a French immersion program, but because of this government's twisted priorities, it will close its doors in June.

The Liberals may have made up their mind about Our Lady of Peace and signaled that there will be more closures to come when they voted down our motion on a moratorium on school closures, but it's not too late for them to change course. They can still announce a moratorium today. I'm giving you a chance.

Mr. Speaker, will the Liberals announce a moratorium on school closures until they can get the process right? You're the ones closing the schools down in the province of Ontario—you.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You can't hide.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I was saying, we build; they cut. We have built 810 new schools and significantly renovated another 780 schools in this province, and that includes 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario.

We are investing in the creation of new schools, better schools, because we are a party that believes in education. We are a party that believes that every child in this province deserves the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and they do that in schools. That's why we're making the investments we are.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: This past week I was shown a letter written to a doctor. It read, "Your patient will be placed on the waiting list for a surgical consultation." Can you guess how long that wait time is? It is "approximately two years."

Now, Mr. Speaker, two years is far too long a wait for a surgical consultation. How is that an acceptable wait time for Ontario patients?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Not knowing the specifics of this case, generally, I would agree with the member opposite that two years is too long of a period to wait. That's why we're working with our physicians, with our front-line health care workers, with our primary care providers that are that foundation and often the gateway to specialist access. We're working with them through a variety of different means to speed up the two elements of referral, which are both equally important: the time for an individual to get from their family doctor or their nurse practitioner to see a specialist in the first place, and then if a specialist deems that a further intervention—a surgical procedure, for example—is required, that time as well.

Despite the fact that we have, across the board, particularly with regard to surgery, either the best or close to the best wait times in all of this country, we're continuing to make improvements.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: On Monday at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, 22 patients were left on stretchers in the hallway, waiting for a room. One gentleman was put behind a privacy screen and given a wheelchair to sit in because there wasn't a stretcher for him.

Stretchers in the hallway, no beds available: Is this the health care legacy that this government wants to leave behind?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: With regard to Queensway Carleton Hospital and other hospitals that have, over recent weeks, experienced capacity issues—and I don't find it any more acceptable than the member opposite does. That's why we're continuing to make investments so that we can alleviate those pressures.

The member opposite, I think, would probably agree that there is an element of this where we saw an outbreak of flu, but also respiratory illnesses this winter. Part of the effect that we're seeing is an annual effect due to the flu, and this flu is worse, certainly, than it was last year.

But we're making investments, including in Queensway Carleton Hospital and others, to ensure that they have the necessary funding to do the important work they do: the Ottawa Heart Institute, a 4.1% increase in funding last year; the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, a 2% increase; the Ottawa Hospital, a \$14-million, 2% increase as well, to help them deal with these capacity issues.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Back to the minister. Leah Lev- esque, vice-president of patient care and chief nursing executive at Queensway Carleton Hospital, had this to say: "I would say it is a crisis when you are cancelling surgery and you've got 22 patients who are on stretchers," and desks are being pushed aside to make room for hospital beds. Those are the words of front-line health care workers.

How is it acceptable for Ontario hospitals to be forced to use office space as makeshift hospital rooms? It's not acceptable. You have to do something.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I mentioned in the previous responses, we're making the necessary investments to allow those hospitals and others across the province to deal with those capacity issues.

But what we won't do is we won't make the kind of commitments and promises that the party opposite did to cut 100,000 jobs, many of them in the health care sector, as they did in the last election. We're not going to do what they did when they were in government and literally close dozens of hospitals across this province and cut thousands of hospital beds.

Mr. Jim Wilson: We did not.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know the former Minister of Health is suggesting that they somehow didn't, but the facts remain that they closed dozens of hospitals when they were in government.

We won't do that. We will make investments. We made an almost 3% increase in the health care budget last

year. We continue to invest in those elements of the health care system that we're proud of. We have some of the best records in the country in terms of performance.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On behalf of New Democrats, I also want to wish all the women legislators and staff and all the people who work in this building who are women a happy International Women's Day, as well as all the women across Ontario.

My question is for the Acting Premier. Over the past few months, I've been welcomed into the homes of many women in this province who are worried about their skyrocketing hydro bills, women like Adele from Cambridge, a single mom who fought back tears as she told me how her children go with less because her hydro bill has doubled in recent years.

Why doesn't the Liberal government come up with a plan that will permanently lower Adele's hydro bill and invest in the services that her family needs, instead of saddling her kids and their kids with the bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to start by saying that we are implementing a plan that reduces the average hydro bill in Ontario households by 25%. We have already done the first 8%, and we are looking to take the further 17% off later this year. So let's remember that we are implementing a plan that will help people like Adele. That is for all the households: 25%, on average.

For those who are low-income families, there's even more support, and for those who live in the rural parts of Ontario, there is even greater relief.

We have a plan. We're implementing a plan. It addresses the stories that we heard from people across this province. I'm proud of it. I wish the leader of the opposition would stand up and say, "Good work."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Adele doesn't just need lower hydro bills; she needs good health care and she needs good schools for her kids. Instead of investing in health care and education, the Premier's hydro plan gives an extra \$40 billion to her well-connected friends on Bay Street. Bringing Hydro One back into public hands will put \$7 billion into the public purse. It will mean we can invest in families like Adele's again.

Doesn't the Acting Premier think that making \$7 billion is better than spending \$40 billion?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You know, Speaker, I was really pleased when the NDP actually came up with a plan to bring down hydro prices, because we had heard lots of identification of the problem from the opposition parties, both parties, but we didn't see much by way of solutions.

So I was very pleased when I heard that the NDP was coming forward with a plan, until I read the plan, and there just was nothing there that would bring down hydro prices. There was nothing there that would achieve the goal that we all want, which is to provide immediate relief for people who are facing real challenges when it comes to their hydro prices.

1050

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, if there's nothing there, why did they scramble so fast to put something out themselves? That's what I want to know.

All across Ontario, we need to invest in schools, in hospitals, in child care and in stronger public services. Stopping the sell-off of Hydro One and returning it to public ownership will give the people of this province a \$7-billion payday and lower their hydro rates permanently.

How is the Liberal government's \$40-billion investment in bankers on Bay Street going to help women like Adele, her children and her grandchildren, live a better life?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, let's be clear: Our plan is fast. It is substantial. It is widespread. It is long-lasting.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The NDP plan, sadly, is very vague. It relies on these expert panels to be struck sometime in the future. Their biggest idea, to buy back the shares of Hydro One, does not take one penny off one bill in this province. There is zero evidence that keeping—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As far as I can tell, the only idea in their plan is to get the deputy leader elected leader and then Prime Minister of Canada, and he will give them 5% off.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock. New question.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Acting Premier. In her one-year report on the progress of her community hubs plan, the Premier told Ontarians that she believes “the province needs to remove barriers to community hubs” and that she was “proud to say” that they “are doing just that.”

But a freedom-of-information document the NDP obtained reveals that the Liberal community hubs plan is being threatened. By what? By the Liberals' own so-called school board modernization plan, and they know it.

Can the Acting Premier tell us why the Liberal government is telling Ontarians one thing in public, but acknowledging in private that they are doing the exact opposite?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We are actively encouraging and supporting opportunities for community hubs, to use excess school space in particular. The Ministry of Infrastructure is embracing an active role in making it easier for community partners to offer integrated and coordinated services through community hubs. In fact, the Minister of Education has about \$450 million to work with school boards and communities and municipalities, with particular emphasis on rural communities, to engage community hubs.

There are many services and communities that can benefit from coming together around a school and animating the community to come together to provide services that people need. There is money in the budget. There are resources that are made available to community leaders to enable them to create hubs, and it's going—

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

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The FOI also shows that—and I'm quoting now from the FOI—“some schools calculated as being underutilized are actually at full capacity.” The government's own documents show that they are closing fully utilized schools based on the failed Mike Harris-era funding formula that the Liberals have not had the political will to fix after 14 years.

Since this government knows that their formula to determine school closures is broken, can the Acting Premier please explain why their government continues to close schools across this province en masse?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I was very pleased yesterday to see that the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Education sent a letter to community partners, to municipalities, to school boards, to say that the best solutions are local solutions: Work together to find the best use, to find the opportunities in your community to put these schools to work.

There is hard work to do. When enrolment is declining, we need to put resources into teaching our students. But those schools are an important part of a community. We all understand that in our own communities, and that's why we're inviting and we're actually putting money into the notion that if communities work together, if school boards who serve the same geographic area can work together, if the municipalities and communities all work together to devise proposals for these buildings, we want to be supportive of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People are already doing that and the Liberals are still closing the schools. They're doing exactly the opposite of what this Deputy Premier just said. The Premier and her Liberal government are telling communities that they support community hubs and they're telling parents they're investing in schools, but in reality the Liberal government has closed 227 schools since 2011, while knowing that at least some of those schools were at full capacity, with some even being used as community hubs and housing child care centres, for example.

Can the Acting Premier explain to the people of this province and explain to parents why she's closing full-capacity, good, neighbourhood-supporting schools, when those families who depend on them are watching them fulfil a broken funding formula from 14 years ago?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, on this side of the House we actually respect school boards and respect the difficult decisions that they have to make. But what I can tell you is that we are active partners in this new model of community hubs. We think that there are opportunities here. We're inviting municipalities, community groups and school boards to work together to find these solutions.

But I do want to repeat—this is a fact—that Ontario has opened 810 new schools. We have renovated an additional 780 schools, and that includes 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario. We remain committed to our students. We remain committed to ensuring that they have the best spaces in which to learn.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Mr. Speaker, when I still worked as an optometrist—and believe me, I miss it every now and then—I spent considerable time implementing electronic medical records in an eye care clinic. I was no IT expert, yet I managed to purchase my hardware, software and staff training within a budget. In contrast, this government has spent over \$27 million just to consult on the software design of CPIN, our new Child Protection Information Network. All of us are committed to the idea of a province-wide electronic data system for child welfare, but can the minister assure us that this time the government is implementing a system that will do everything workers and children need it to do?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member for the question, because it is an important question. CPIN, the information network we're implementing across the province, is going to ensure that when young people enter child protection, their information will be protected, but also that it will be shared among different protection service agencies.

We want to make sure that when a young person is placed in protection in Oshawa and for some reason moves to Toronto, there's a communication line and no child is left behind. This is our plan to ensure that children are at the centre of decision-making, and that when they move from one jurisdiction into the next, all people who are there to make sure that they're safe have the right information, on time, and the most relevant information to date.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Again to the minister: Mr. Speaker, I think Ontario residents really do believe that Jeffrey

Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson might be alive today if Ontario's children's aid societies had had a central database that would have flagged their murderers as unfit guardians.

The government has spent hundreds of millions on CPIN, yet few child welfare agencies are using the system, and it still needs costly upgrading and training. This new database isn't practical and is not even fully searchable.

Our social workers are now being asked to be trained stenographers rather than helping children. They must spend hours typing, since no one seemed to have the thought to make CPIN voice-input-friendly.

Will the minister tell us why Ontario residents should count on his government to suddenly show information-technology savviness?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I hope the member opposite doesn't think that this is just an easy task of putting in some information and moving it from here to there. We're talking about millions of records that date back many years. When it comes to children, we need to make sure that the information that's being inputted is done accurately and it's done with efficiency.

I'll tell you that, to date, we've moved 40 million records, representing 15 societies. That's a lot of information that is being moved. That represents 37% of all children and family records, to date, that have been moved.

We've got a plan moving forward. We didn't want to do this overnight, because we have to be careful on the approach. We have five more societies that are scheduled to be moved over into the CPIN system.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the progress we've made. But we need to do this in a very careful way so that we don't make mistakes, and it's exactly what the member opposite is suggesting.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But the Premier said she'd made mistakes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wouldn't risk it. New question.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma questions est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Carmen Sebastian is a 68-year-old woman who has advanced-stage cancer. She is one of the 100,000 Canadian women who get diagnosed with cancer each year. On Friday, Carmen got a very disturbing voice mail, telling her that there was a province-wide shortage of chemo drugs and her treatment would be delayed indefinitely.

Speaker, I cannot imagine the worry and the stress that Carmen and dozens of other patients went through this past weekend. Carmen has a simple question, and I hope you'll agree that she deserves an answer: Why was there no backup plan to prevent cancer patients like Carmen from having their cancer treatment cancelled?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Speaking directly to Carmen: I can only imagine the unnecessary stress and anguish that

she and her family and loved ones had to go through as a result of that phone call.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that those of us in the Legislature and Carmen and Ontarians know that this was a national issue. It wasn't specific to Ontario. It was the result of a quarantine by Health Canada of thousands of vials of 5-FU, which is the specific anti-cancer medication used in a number of situations, including breast cancer.

However, when we were alerted to this—on the same day, Friday of last week—and Cancer Care Ontario was as well, we immediately contacted Health Canada and put into motion a process that resulted, on Monday afternoon, in more than 3,000 vials of this cancer-treating medication being released by Health Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, our health care system failed. It failed people like Carmen, who had to live through having her cancer treatment cancelled.

I would like the government and the minister—after he agreed that he learned about this last Friday—I would like him to answer another question that a lot of Ontarians are wondering about: Will the minister tell us exactly how many Ontario hospitals actually ran out of this chemo drug, and how many patients were affected and had their cancer treatments cancelled because of this shortage?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: After we got involved on Friday through the ministry and Cancer Care Ontario—in conversations with Health Canada, they understood just how much of a priority this was.

Over 3,000 vials were released Monday afternoon. Mackenzie Health received vials yesterday afternoon. They have now either rescheduled or are in the process of rescheduling every single one of those individuals. They're opening a clinic as well this weekend and are confident that, within the week, they will have provided the appropriate treatment to all of those individuals.

We have a mechanism in place to ensure coordination. I can also say that Mackenzie Health was the only hospital that was impacted by this shortage. That problem is now solved.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of the Status of Women. Today is International Women's Day, and we celebrate the achievements of women and look ahead at the work that needs to be done to create a fairer society.

In fact, just last Friday we were reminded of the fight that we, as a society, still face. I, along with thousands of other Canadians, was appalled to hear that there are those who still believe that "a drunk can consent."

Last September, I hosted a sexual violence and harassment community networking and advocacy session in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. This session brought together key members of our community who work tirelessly to fight sexual violence and harassment.

I know that our province has done extraordinary work to fight this mentality. On Monday, I was pleased to see an update to the sexual violence and harassment action plan. This is a step in the right direction, but I know and we all know that there is more work that still needs to be done.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please update the House on the ongoing work being done around sexual violence and harassment?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to the member for this very important question and for her ongoing advocacy on this issue.

Speaker, as a politician, a woman and a mother, the statistic that one in three women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime is absolutely unacceptable to me. All Ontarians deserve to feel safe from sexual violence and harassment in their communities, workplaces, homes and schools.

In this province, we believe strongly that consent has to be affirmative and ongoing—yes means yes and no means no—which is why we've built consent into the updated physical health and education curriculum and why we launched our two public awareness campaigns, #ItsNeverOkay and #WhoWillYouHelp. We not only want to raise awareness about sexual violence but also challenge attitudes and encourage behavioural change. After all, we must talk to our children about safety.

This is all a step in the right direction. We're calling on all Ontarians. We all have a role to play in ending violence against women and girls.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you to the minister for her answer. I know that this government recognizes the importance of educating the public on sexual violence and harassment.

Unfortunately, the members in this House are well aware that violence against women remains a real danger in society. In fact, more than 10,000 women and over 6,900 of their children were served by a violence-against-women shelter last year. Let's be clear: Violence against women impacts us all. It's not just the women who are victims; it's their children, their families and also their communities.

Our government recognizes this and has increased spending on programs to reduce violence against women by over 60% since 2003. However, we know that there's more work to be done. Could the minister please outline how we continue to support the violence-against-women sector in Ontario?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands. We both visited Kingston Interval House in her riding, and it was obvious that she was recognized as a great supporter of women fleeing domestic violence.

My ministry invests \$147 million annually to support the violence-against-women sector. Last summer, we opened a new shelter in Elgin county, and earlier this

winter I announced the building of a new shelter in Dryden.

Through the \$1-million Rural Realities Fund, we helped rural, remote and northern communities address the unique challenges they face.

Along with partner ministries, we launched Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking. Part of the strategy is a partnership with the Ontario Native Women's Association to deliver five indigenous human trafficking liaisons.

Our government continues to invest in supports and services to ensure we're building a safer future for every woman and girl in this province.

1110

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Allister and Marion McKerroll have been together for 69 years. They were community builders and even helped build a nursing home, the International Odd Fellow and Rebekah home on Brooks Street in Barrie. But when Allister and Marion got sick and frail, the province's long-term-care system forced them apart.

Both the Premier and the health minister have stated in this House that spousal reunification in long-term care is "extremely" and "personally" important to them, and keeping couples together is the highest priority: "There is no other priority."

My question, then, is if it's so extremely and personally important, and if there's no higher priority than keeping couples together, then why have Allister and Marion been forced to live apart for over a year?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate learning here in the Legislature of this couple. Not that long ago, we had a situation in another part of the province where I have to say the member, an NDP member at that time, engaged me very directly, privately, and we worked hard together, collaboratively, to try to find a solution. Ultimately, we were successful in finding a solution for those individuals who, for a variety of reasons, found themselves in similar circumstances.

I would invite the member opposite; I would be enthusiastic—overjoyed in fact—to have the opportunity to work with him to see if we might resolve this particular case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the minister: Well, Premier Wynne wrote to the family last month, on February 24, to acknowledge the separation and said that she'd ask you to deal with it. So either she didn't do what she said or you're not doing anything with the file.

Sadly, the McKerrolls are not the only couple forced to live alone and die alone under your long-term-care policies. There are others who have been told by the CCACs that, due to high wait times—the McKerrolls' case is 3.5 years to five years—it's not even worth trying to live together in long-term care.

The fact is, you left Ontario with a severe shortage of beds. As of today, there are 26,500 seniors on your waitlist, a list that will double to 50,000 within five years. The Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors and the Ontario Long Term Care Association have asked to you start fixing this mess by adding at least 2,500 beds in the upcoming budget. Given the heartache, given the inexcusable wait and the suffering of all these seniors, will you commit to adding those beds as an absolute bare minimum?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the member, I think, knows that we have committed to redeveloping 30,000 beds over the next number of years, but over approximately the last decade, we have added 10,000 new beds to the long-term-care system, and we continue to make important investments.

As well, I do recall the couple in question, and I do recall it because the member from Barrie has been discussing this case with me, is directly involved and is directly involved with my ministry in trying to resolve it. We have been working hard through the ministry with the member from Barrie to resolve this particular situation.

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. The year 2017 marks the 30th anniversary of pay equity legislation in Ontario. After 30 years, however, the lack of active enforcement of pay equity laws has contributed to a gender wage gap that is stuck at 30%—a gap that is significantly wider for immigrant and indigenous women and women with disabilities.

The closing the gender wage gap steering committee called for amendments to the Pay Equity Act in its final report last August. More than six months after the release of that report, nothing has happened.

Can the Acting Premier explain why she is dragging her heels on the immediate actions, like amending the Pay Equity Act, that would make a huge difference to close the gender wage gap for women in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that excellent and timely question. There's no doubt—I think all members in this House will agree—that the gender wage gap still disadvantages women across Ontario and across every jurisdiction, and we need to deal with it. Other parties in the past have said that they would deal with it, but they haven't.

We haven't made the progress that needs to be made. The conversation that is taking place right now in the province of Ontario involves some very real work that was done by the gender wage gap working group. They worked on behalf of government. They came from business, they came from labour, they came from the civil service; they brought us their best advice. We're moving that on now. We've got a group together of some of the best minds in this province, some of the best minds on this issue. Their first meeting is scheduled for April 13.

I want Ontario to be a leader in this. We should all want Ontario to be a leader in this. It's simply time. The level of tolerance for the gender wage gap simply has expired in this province, Speaker.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: This government has had 14 years. When the non-unionized auto manufacturers recently sought changes to workers' personal leave, the Premier changed the law for them overnight through quiet regulation. When large construction firms like EllisDon sought reforms that negatively impacted workers, you quickly changed the laws for them.

What are you going to do today for the majority of low-paid workers in this province—almost 60% of them women—to have decent, secure work that pays at least a \$15-an-hour minimum wage?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you again to the member. As I said, this is a very timely question, Speaker.

I'm proud to stand in this House. With the Changing Workplaces Review, with the Gender Wage Gap Strategy, we're confronting issues where the solution has escaped previous governments. We're taking concrete action. When the advice came forward from the gender wage gap working group, there was work to be done in the future but they told us, "There are things you can do right now," and we acted upon that, Speaker.

Gender-based analysis is used by this government. It's required. When we're passing any policy that relates to this government, it needs to go through a gender-wage-gap lens. That wasn't done in the past. It should have been. Under this government it is being done. We're moving ahead on this issue. We're determined to put an end to the gender wage gap in Ontario.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Cristina Martins: This question is for the Minister of Housing and minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. On behalf of many of my constituents in Davenport, I'd like to raise a critical issue, an issue I have raised in the past.

Rental costs are rising at a dramatic pace in the Toronto area. I've heard from my constituents about a lack of stability in the price of their rents, making it difficult for people to find affordable rental options. This is an issue that does not just affect those who are less fortunate, but oftentimes middle-income earners and young professionals who are just building lives and careers in the city. Not being able to budget for housing leads to insecurity that makes it difficult for one to plan for one's future.

Mr. Speaker, what is the government's position on rising rental costs in Davenport and across Ontario?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the member for her steadfast advocacy on this issue. Mr. Speaker, finding an affordable house in a community we love is a goal we all share. It's about putting down roots. It's about raising a family and spending each day in a place we truly love.

I know Ontarians face real challenges in our booming market as they search for an affordable place to live. Too many are feeling the pinch of a rental market that's struggling to keep up with demand. Through the Residential Tenancies Act, we provide protection for tenants. The act ensures that rent increase guidelines are kept to a maximum of 2.5% per year for units built before 1991. For 2017, the rent increase guideline is 1.5%.

But we know there's more that needs to be done. That's why we're looking at ways to ensure and increase protections for tenants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'm pleased to have had many important conversations with the minister about the rising rents facing my constituents, and always appreciate his attention to this critical issue.

I'm pleased that the minister shares and understands my concerns. Individuals and families deserve the peace of mind of knowing that they can secure an affordable home that will provide them with a reliable foundation where they can live comfortably, secure employment, raise their families and thrive. That's what we all want.

The supply of affordable rental units in Toronto is dwindling, and government must take action to address this. Mr. Speaker, will the minister inform this House what actions he's undertaking to get more affordable rental options into the market?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you again to the member for Davenport. Ensuring a robust supply of affordable rental units is critical to ensuring people have options to choose from. This includes working with our municipal partners to make secondary suites—those are the self-contained residential units that already exist in many homes—available quickly, helping communities better respond to renters' needs.

1120

We've also just passed legislation that allows communities to use a new tool, a tool called inclusionary zoning, to require that affordable units be created and kept long-term in new residential developments. Our government is also freezing the municipal property tax on apartment buildings to provide some relief to renters.

Mr. Speaker, 82% of rental units in the province are pre-1991 buildings, and because of that, they're protected by rent control. But I know booming areas face concerns. I'm continuing to look at ways to increase the supply of rental options across the province.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. In May 2016, your Liberal government announced that the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre's main facility would have its body scanner installed by the end of this month. After a drug overdose death at EMDC, former Minister Oraziotti said that he would prioritize the installation of the body scanner.

Now, the new minister's office is saying the scanner is "prioritized for installation in fall 2017." You keep using

the word “prioritize.” I do not think it means what you think it means. How exactly does failing to meet a deadline mean “prioritize”?

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: J'aimerais aussi souhaiter une belle journée de la femme à toutes les madames ici et partout en Ontario.

Just to make sure, I said my little piece. I thank the member opposite for his question. First off, one of my most important responsibilities as minister is the safety and security of our staff and our inmates. Our government has recognized the challenges surrounding contraband at our correctional facilities, which is why we've announced \$9.5 million in funding to install body scanners at each and every facility across our province by 2018. This makes Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to install body scanners at every jail.

We've installed one of the first scanners at the adjoining regional intermittent centre right next to the EMDC, where we can have inmates scanned in exceptional situations. EMDC will be getting a body scanner this year. I can confirm that 11 facilities already have—

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Words are empty; they need to be followed up with action now.

Back to the minister: Ontario's gold standard jail, Toronto South Detention Centre, was recently called a “\$1-billion hellhole” by Toronto Life magazine. The jail has been a disaster from the start. Unbreakable window were broken by inmates. Officers worried that inmates would grind glass into powder and blow it into their faces. They were told by management to wear goggles. Negative pressure rooms for inmates with contagious airborne diseases regularly malfunction. The software system controlling cameras, intercoms and locks regularly stops working.

When I asked why a female officer was trapped in an elevator with inmates for an hour, the staff were slapped with a threatening memo to keep quiet. Well, it didn't work. Staff keep speaking out and the truth has been told about the cells.

Speaker, to the minister: Why did the government go ahead with Toronto South Detention Centre's experimental design despite warnings from the Auditor General and staff?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Again, I want to thank the member for his good question. I want to take the time today, actually, to recognize the hard work our correctional officers, our nurses, our maintenance staff and our cooking staff—everyone who works with challenging situations at times every day to keep our institutions and our inmates safe.

I recognize that the Toronto South Detention Centre is not without its challenges, and we know that more work needs to be done for it to live up to its full potential. We need to hire more staff, reduce the lockdowns and improve the overall condition of the institutions.

In fact, I was there a couple of weeks ago. I visited the jail and I saw a group of passionate staff who are

dedicated to their vital role in maintaining law and order in our society. Through this visit, I got a sense of the progress that actually needs to be made. Our government is committed to the transformation, and I'm working on this.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. This government talks a lot about child care, but we see no action. They talk about the need to get women back into the workforce and the reality that child care is just too expensive for a lot of families, but when it comes to taking action, this government fails.

Last week, the Liberal government voted against investing in not-for-profit public child care centres. Can the Acting Premier tell us why she believes private corporations should be making money off children?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The minister responsible for early years and child care.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member opposite for this very important question. I want to be very clear about what we mean when we're talking about funding for child care operators. This type of funding supports subsidies for low- and middle-income families. It actually supports programming for children with special needs, and supports increased wages for skilled child care workers and early childhood educators. What I'm trying to say is essentially that this funding follows the child.

Absolutely, we understand the important role that non-profits play in our child care system. That is why in Ontario, 70% of child care centres are non-profit. Past capital investments have only gone to school-based, not-for-profit child care.

Speaker, families expect us to give them more options, not fewer. That means ensuring that all Ontarians have access to quality, affordable child care spaces in rural areas and urban areas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: All evidence points to the fact that not-for-profit and public child care is higher quality. In fact, when it comes to special-needs kids, they are being served better in not-for-profit and public child care. That's just the reality that exists. But instead of supporting that model, the Liberals are spending public dollars on for-profit, private child care.

I guess this shouldn't be a surprise, Speaker. This Liberal government always seems to prioritize the well-connected and well-off over everyday families. The Liberal government must understand that regular families need support, and that investing in non-profit child care is the best way to help the people who really need it.

Why do the Acting Premier and her Liberal government want to see child care being traded on the stock market and kids being profited off of by private companies?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm so happy and pleased to be answering this question, because absolutely

we are building child care in this province. We are transforming it, making it more accessible and more affordable for all Ontarians, not just for some Ontarians.

The bottom line is this: Not all Ontarians have access to for-profit and not-for-profit centres in this province. We have to build a system that supports all Ontarians. In some instances, in northern areas, the only way to create more access is to ensure that those centres in those areas actually get the support they need. We are not going to go in one route or the other; we're going to ensure that all Ontarians and all Ontario families get access to good-quality child care.

Interjections.

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

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Labour. As you've heard already, today is International Women's Day. This day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, but it also challenges all of us to seek change in society. The theme for this year is #BeBoldForChange, which calls for a better working world—a more inclusive, gender-equal world.

Ontario has been bold for change. In particular, our Minister of Labour has been looking at change in the working world through the gender wage gap consultations. Can the minister please update the House and talk about the progress that we are making?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I want to thank the member for that question, the interest that she has and her advocacy. I also want to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day. To the women, to the men, to the boys and girls in this House: This should be a day that we're all engaged in.

I'm so confident that the #BeBoldForChange theme is going to continue to get people all over the world engaged on this issue. Speaker, this is an issue that begs the attention of all members of this House. It crosses partisan lines. This government is absolutely committed to closing the gender wage gap and to building on the progress we've already made.

1130

As I outlined earlier, Speaker, the first meeting of the group is April 13. We're going to get the best advice, we're going to get the best feedback, and we're going to make sure that the advice we received in the past is implemented. We've taken those immediate steps that we could take without further consultation.

We are "bold for change" in the province of Ontario. We're going to increase fairness in this province. We're going to close the gender wage gap.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I want to thank the minister for his answer and for being such a strong advocate for closing the gender wage gap. He is right: We all need to work together, because International Women's Day re-

minds us that, despite our progress, there is still work to do. On average, women still earn less than men, and, simply put, this needs to change.

We also know that all women across the economic spectrum are affected by the wage gap, but the gap is more pronounced for women who are minorities, aboriginal, newcomers or living with disabilities.

Deloitte reported that the gender wage gap represents 2.5% of Ontario's GDP, and closing it could generate \$11.6 billion in an increased annual consumption of goods and services.

Speaker, through you to the minister, could the minister please explain what else our government is doing to ensure women continue to play an important role in our working world?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, thank you very much for that very good question; I want to thank the member again.

It's not only the right thing to do; the fact of the matter is that equality for women when it comes to the Ontario economy—to any economy—simply makes good business sense as well. It makes sense for workers. It makes sense for business. It makes sense for our economy. It increases productivity. It strengthens skill sets. It contributes to a healthy workplace. It prepares for the workplace of tomorrow.

It was great to see the Ontario Federation of Labour here at Queen's Park this morning contributing to this very important conversation.

Speaker, women play a critical role in our labour force. At the Ministry of Labour, we're determined to improve the working lives and the conditions of all workers in Ontario, including women. On International Women's Day, we've got to redouble our efforts to engage with labour and business, and continue to make Ontario one of the best places in the world to work.

GENETIC DISCRIMINATION

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Acting Premier. Speaker, this government's federal Liberal counterparts in Ottawa today have an opportunity to take a great legislative step towards ending genetic discrimination. And yet, while government members here in Ontario seem brave enough to take that step provincially—and I commend the member for Eglinton–Lawrence for his private member's bill that would take similar steps—their federal cousins seem to be getting cold feet.

After federal attempts to gut the bill last month, the justice minister has been polling our Premiers to drum up further opposition. Speaker, the justice minister is looking for advice—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chief government whip, second time.

Mr. Michael Harris: Bill S-201 goes to a vote this afternoon. Will the government assure their federal cousins today that the people of Ontario don't have time for constitutional, jurisdictional excuses; they want action to end genetic discrimination? Will you agree?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for asking the question, albeit an odd question. It sounds like this is a question that the member should be asking in the federal Parliament, because he is talking about a federal piece of legislation that is not up for debate in this House. I think the member is referring to a bill called S-201, which may be voted in the House.

The federal Minister of Justice, I understand, has advised her caucus that the bill may be unconstitutional because of a division of powers between federal and provincial governments under the Constitution of Canada. Whatever the case may be, Speaker, that is a decision of the federal Parliament and of the federal Minister of Justice, and has very little to do with this Parliament.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: I will remind the minister that the federal justice minister issued your government a letter asking for input, and so therefore it does become an Ontario issue.

Speaker, of course, Ontarians and Canadians deserve to live free of discrimination. In fact, constitutional experts consulted on the federal bill agreed that it does not overstep on jurisdictional boundaries.

The government member from Eglinton–Lawrence here in the province of Ontario—your member—called it “appalling that they’re hiding behind this provincial jurisdictional, constitutional excuse for not ... ending discriminatory practices in provinces.” He called it “mind-boggling,” and I agree with that member. The federal justice minister has turned to the Premiers for support. Will the Premier give her support to end genetic discrimination? Yes or no?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Once again, Speaker, this is a federal matter. I’m not in any position as the Attorney General for the province of Ontario to be giving constitutional advice to the federal government. They have a very robust ministry of justice, they have a very robust constitutional branch, and they have the full capacity to be able to provide any legal advice whatsoever.

The federal Minister of Justice has written, I believe, to the Council of the Federation. I leave it to that secretariat to be able to opine. But it is not our place to be giving advice on constitutional matters to the federal Parliament. That is solely within the sole discretion of the federal Parliament.

What I know is that under our Human Rights Code we have very clear laws when it comes to discrimination on any grounds, and that includes grounds like genetic discrimination. I do want to applaud the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for bringing a private member’s bill dealing with genetic discrimination. He’s always ahead of time, and I believe that bill has passed through second reading.

MINIMUM WAGE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Acting Premier. Two weeks ago, striking workers from York

University and the University of Toronto came to Queen’s Park to hold a silent vigil. I had the opportunity to hear some of their stories.

One in particular hit hard. This cafeteria worker on strike, a single mother paid just \$12 an hour, found it impossible to make ends meet. Just providing lunch for her daughter is always a challenge. Through tears, she told me that sometimes she has to ask the bus driver to let her on for free so that she can go to work. A single working mother shouldn’t have to struggle or strike for fairness in Ontario. This woman works in a public institution on contract. It’s an example of the ever-growing precarious work in this province over the last 13 years.

Workers at York just settled, with no help from this government, for \$15 an hour. Will this government raise the minimum wage for all workers in Ontario to \$15 an hour?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you for that important question. I do applaud the settlement that was reached in that regard. Between 1996 and 2003, we had a frozen minimum wage in the province of Ontario. It didn’t increase once from \$6.85. Since 2003 to the present date, we’ve increased the minimum wage by 64%, a total of 10 times. What business asked for was flexibility. What the workers asked for, Speaker—what the workers asked for was fairness, and they wanted to know that increases were coming on a regular basis.

The minimum wage right now in Ontario is \$11.40. It goes up every single year, and it’s predictable. When the advice was asked for, when we went out to poverty advocates, where was the NDP?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Nowhere.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Nowhere to be found, Speaker. They didn’t raise their voice when the workers of this province needed the NDP the most—

Interjections.

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

Interjection: You try living on \$11.40 an hour.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is absolutely never too late to be asked to leave.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex has given notice of his dissatisfaction with an answer to his question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services concerning body scanners and safety. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Anyone got lunch dates? I can delay it.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Kitchener–Conestoga has given notice of his dissatisfaction with an answer to his question given by the Attorney General concerning genetic discrimination. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: In my answer, I said that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence’s private member’s bill has passed second reading. I meant to say it has passed first reading.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have the right to correct their record.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, I want to correct the record to my answer today. The number should be \$50 million, and not \$450 million.

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

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: With your indulgence, I just would like to recognize our young parliamentarians who are here: Lydia Philippe, du Collège catholique Mer Bleue; Aline Ahouzi, du Collège catholique Mer Bleue; Sanayah Zépher, du Collège catholique Mer Bleue; Carlie Angelle Pierre, du Collège catholique Mer Bleue; Yasmine Zemni, de l’École secondaire publique Gisèle-Lalonde; Clémence Thabet, de l’École secondaire catholique Béatrice-Desloges; et Mathew Casey-Juarez, de l’École secondaire publique Louis-Riel qui sont avec nous aujourd’hui.

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

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I just know there’s a good friend of mine, Liam McGuinty, sitting in the members’ gallery. I just want to welcome him: another good McGuinty in the House. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Further introduction of guests.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I am pleased to welcome Jacob Ralston, along with his mother, Melissa Ralston, and grandparents Marion and Dave Ralston, who are here with us today from the riding of Oshawa. Welcome.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

VILLAGE OF COBDEN

Mr. John Yakabuski: Kraft Hockeyville is back and the 10 finalists have been named. Cobden in my riding is

one of them. Cobden is the community, as my friend the late Harold Dobson used to say, that was without a doubt the centre of the universe. The Hockeyville committee has made a most compelling case for why Cobden and its Astrolabe arena should be named Kraft Hockeyville 2017. You can view the video at KHV2017.ca.

Cobden is a wonderful community with a population of about 1,000, situated on Highway 17 between Pembroke and Renfrew. It is near Cobden where Samuel de Champlain lost his astrolabe while exploring the Ottawa River. It was lost until 1867, when it was found near what is now appropriately named Astrolabe Lake.

It’s also the home of Mussie, the mysterious monster of Muskrat Lake. Perhaps less famous than the Loch Ness monster, the legend of Mussie is no less fascinating. Numerous sightings have been made, but unfortunately no photographic evidence is available. I urge you to get up there and see if you can capture an image of Mussie yourself.

Voting will take place on March 12 and 13. I urge every member of this Legislature to inform their staff, constituents and friends and support Cobden for the title of Kraft Hockeyville. Vote early and vote often.

I want to congratulate and thank Chris Pleau, Jerry McIntyre, Ted Barron and the Ottawa Valley Thunder, as well as Matt LeMay, the videographer, for putting together Cobden’s bid.

I also want to congratulate and thank the communities of Pembroke, Renfrew, Deep River, Beachburg and Madawaska Valley for also submitting bids. You’ll have another opportunity next year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’ve got to stop swimming in that lake. I’m scaring people.

Members’ statements.

LEIS WOOD PRODUCTS

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to take this opportunity to talk for a few minutes about a small firm in my riding—one of my neighbours, actually—Leis Wood Products.

Leis Wood Products takes shavings from our local planning mill, puts them in bags, and they are distributed throughout Ontario to horse farms and other people. It’s a family business. Bruce helped his kids out, helped Andrea and Jason. It’s a thriving little business, but it has the problems that other businesses in the province and in the riding share, and I’d like to explain one of them.

In 2008, this little business started up and they used 9,000 kilowatt hours of electricity a month, and the bill was \$984.51. In 2016, they used 12,000 kilowatts, so that’s an increase of a third, because they employ more people. It’s a growing little business, okay? But the bill: \$5,282.

Now, what the Leises want to know and what we want to know—it’s an intergenerational business, but now it seems with this new Liberal program that the second, third and fourth generations are going to be paying for it, and they don’t even know if they’re going to get the discount, Speaker. They need some answers.

JACOB RALSTON

Mr. Granville Anderson: I rise today to share with you an inspiring story about Jacob Ralston, a young boy who resides in Oshawa.

At the age of only eight years old Jacob was diagnosed with severe inflammatory bowel disease, later changed to Crohn's.

After undergoing hospital visits Jacob approached his mother with a wish to create child-friendly treatment rooms at the Hospital for Sick Children. Jacob's overall goal is to update the outpatient treatment rooms so that children can have a comforting and uplifting environment that promotes healing. He plans to install iPads to each treatment chair, bring in bubble tube machines for some of the younger children and also purchase light covers to replace the harsh lights with pictures of the sky.

Mr. Speaker, Jacob's efforts have been absolutely incredible. I am proud to share that he has raised \$30,182 out of his \$60,000 goal toward this project. In addition, he continues to bring the community together through his fundraising initiatives.

In December I had the pleasure of attending Jacob's 13th birthday bonanza celebration, which was a drop-in event open to the public. Jacob hadn't had a birthday party in three years because he was so sick. It was amazing to see everyone come together for such a great cause.

Despite all of the health complications and treatment that he deals with on a daily basis, Jacob is determined to make a difference in our society.

I'd like to thank Jacob for being an inspiration to us all. Please join me in further congratulating Jacob Ralston on his outstanding efforts, and please make an effort to come and say hi to this incredible young man.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Jacob is in the House. Thank you, Jacob.

WOMEN'S RURAL RESOURCE CENTRE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Today we are celebrating International Women's Day, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the invaluable work being done by the Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy. Their dedicated team supports women who are living with violence in their lives. They help not only to keep these women and their children safe, but also to equip them to make good decisions for themselves and their families. Recently, they have expanded their programming to include family and children's counselling, advocacy work and food security.

In honour of International Women's Day, the Women's Rural Resource Centre will hold an open house on Friday. I would encourage anyone in the community to attend. This will be an opportunity to learn more about their excellent work and to meet their wonderful staff, volunteers and community partners. Visitors will also learn about their community garden, which flourishes under the theme, "The Unstoppable Garden."

For those of us who are familiar with this organization, we know that the work they do runs year-round. But on this day in particular, for the central work of Strathroy's Women's Rural Resource Centre, I wish to sincerely thank and congratulate their board of directors, executive director Corey Allison, their staff and volunteers.

CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY WORKERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The work of interpreters, literacy instructors, audiologists and speech-language pathologists is vital to people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing and all those who access the services of the Canadian Hearing Society.

When families rallied at Queen's Park to save provincial schools for the deaf, Canadian Hearing Society interpreters were among those who worked tirelessly to ensure that no one went without service. They played a key role in raising awareness on this important issue.

Each and every day, workers at the Canadian Hearing Society play a vital role to so many in Windsor and throughout Ontario. It's time we valued their important contributions to the people of this province. Four years without a contract is four years too long. It's time for CHS to return to the bargaining table and provide workers at the Canadian Hearing Society with the respect that they deserve.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's a great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on International Women's Day. As a mother to three daughters, I'm proud of the work that our government is doing to demonstrate that young women in Ontario can do anything they set their minds to.

Roughly 2,400 years ago Plato wrote about women in The Republic and said that they "had the right of first access." And why was that important at that time, or even now for that matter? Because he recognized the power of the woman through her ability to give birth, and her decision about that life and whether or not she was going to nurture it.

1510

And while there is no doubt that we have come a long way since then, have we come far enough? I would expect not.

Many indigenous cultures and First Nations groups recognize the power of women and revere them through their ability to give birth.

Mr. Speaker, my wish on this International Women's Day is that each one of us succeeds in building up our communities in such a way that we all advance, protect and nurture women and in the province as a whole. We need to create an Ontario where no woman or girl needs to live in fear, an Ontario where girls know their rights and feel a sense of hope about their future.

We need to look around and each one of us needs to lift the lives of other woman along the way. Every single one of us is responsible.

Let us carry forward the determination and goodwill for women on this International Women's Day until this time next year.

LUCIO PAVONE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I rise today to offer congratulations and appreciation to Lucio Pavone, Chippewa Secondary School's principal. Mr. Pavone was recently awarded Canada's central region national Principals of Music Award. This award recognizes the efforts made by principals in support of music education in schools across Canada.

Lucio's passion and dedication, coupled with his love for music and education, made him the clear choice for the award. His vision and collaboration with teachers at Chippewa Secondary School resulted in the expansion of the school's music department.

As part of the award, Chippewa Secondary School will be receiving \$1,500 to go towards their music program. This money will help ensure the ongoing development and growth of an essential part of the education process.

Speaker, on a personal note, Lucio's mother, Lena, made our wedding cake 30 years ago. His father, Peppy, is a lifelong supporter of the Italian club—the Davedi club—in North Bay.

I again would like to congratulate and thank Lucio Pavone for his dedication and devotion to his students and the continued success of the school's music program.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: As we celebrate International Women's Day here in Ontario, I'd like to recognize the important work of the Canadian Federation of University Women, CFUW, and their Etobicoke branch.

CFUW Etobicoke was established in 1952 with only 10 members. Today they boast a membership of over 300. Together, this group of exceptional women is working to raise awareness of social issues.

I recently had the opportunity to attend one of CFUW's events, the Valentine's Stop the Violence Breakfast, with the Honourable Dipika Damerla, Minister of Seniors Affairs. Minister Damerla remarked on the important work groups like CFUW do to promote women's issues, especially issues surrounding women seniors.

At this event the keynote speaker was Judith Wahl, the executive director of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, who talked to us about the risks that women seniors face, the specific factors that are at play and how we can fight them.

On this very important International Women's Day, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank women like Judith Wahl for their ongoing advocacy for women and women seniors, and of course CFUW Etobicoke for bringing strong women together to effect change in our community.

The beneficiary of this year's event was Ernestine's Women's Shelter in Etobicoke, which also does spectacular work day in and day out helping women in need in our community.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise on behalf of my constituents in Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry for the work they've done over the last six months on the school closure issue. I look around at some of the other ridings. They immediately rallied our community against this unfair closure of 12 schools, some of which have historically been in place before 1800. These are really a big part of the community.

When I look at the stats, as far as replies back to the board, we were head and shoulders above the neighbouring ridings, with replies close to a thousand, where other schools are in the 30 range. It really brought the community together.

They worked together, basically neighbour to neighbour, to look at a plan that the government could have put in force to stop the closures—not of all; we're not arguing that some of the schools do have an issue and maybe have to be closed.

Especially the high schools—they are the heart of the community. If I look at just at my own, with the Williamstown Fair, we need the high schools to provide the volunteers not only of tomorrow but of today. The current program is where they come in, they dedicate hours and generally they turn into not only great citizens but great volunteers of tomorrow.

So I want to commend my community.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES IN MPP CONSTITUENCY OFFICES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LES SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS DANS LES BUREAUX DE CIRCONSCRIPTION DES DÉPUTÉS

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to amend the French Language Services Act with respect to the provision of services in French / Projet de loi 102, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services en français en ce qui concerne la prestation des services en français.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for un petit statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci, monsieur le Président.

Le projet de loi est très simple. Les articles 1 et 7 et le paragraphe 5 de la Loi sur les services en français sont modifiés en vue de rendre cette dernière applicable aux bureaux de circonscription des députés de l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario. Si un Franco-Ontarien ou Franco-Ontarienne veut des services en français de son député, il pourrait les avoir dans son bureau de circonscription.

PERSONAL INJURY AND ACCIDENT
VICTIMS PROTECTION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES VICTIMES DE LÉSIONS
CORPORELLES ET D'ACCIDENTS

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 103, An Act to amend the Law Society Act and the Solicitors Act with respect to matters related to personal injury claims and client agreements / Projet de loi 103, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Barreau et la Loi sur les procureurs à l'égard de questions liées aux demandes d'indemnisation pour lésions corporelles et aux ententes avec les clients.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: If passed, this bill would ban the use of referral fees by personal injury lawyers. It would require that all advertising by personal injury lawyers be cleared by the Law Society of Upper Canada, that all fees must be in prescribed plain English and standardized, and that contingency fees be capped at 15% and no double-dipping allowed in regard to fees.

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PETITIONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have an important petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Bill C-14, the federal legislation which legalized medical assistance in dying (MAID) in Canada explicitly affirms it is not intended to compel anyone to act against their deeply held beliefs; and

“Whereas the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has adopted the effective-referral protocol for MAID, which may compel health care professionals to act contrary to their deeply held beliefs; and

“Whereas the effective-referral protocol for MAID is globally unprecedented; and

“Whereas there are viable alternatives for the provision of effective access to MAID that would allow all health care professionals to continue to practise with ethical integrity; and

“Whereas this effective-referral-protocol policy may compel health care professionals to make a dehumanizing choice between their profession and faith, conscience or commitment to the Hippocratic oath;

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

“To immediately take action to protect the conscience rights of Ontario’s health care professionals by abrogating the effective-referral protocol for medical assistance in dying.”

I support this petition and send it over with page Rowan.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sarah Campbell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

“Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

“Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

“Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, health promoters and managers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature and give it to page Mary to deliver to the table.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM
PROGRAMS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontarians are concerned that individual, systemic and cultural racism continues to create unfair outcomes for racial minorities in Ontario;

“Whereas the time has come to remove the social and economic barriers that prevent our province from achieving true equality;

“Whereas in order to accomplish that objective and to tackle racism in all its forms, our government has created the new Anti-Racism Directorate;

“We, the undersigned, acknowledge both our support for the concept behind the Anti-Racism Directorate, and recognize that there is still work to be done to build an inclusive Ontario where everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or cultural background, has an equal opportunity to succeed.

“Therefore, we petition the government to work with key partners, such as businesses, community organizations, educational institutions and the Ontario Human Rights Commission in an effort to create a scope for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

“This petition encourages the directorate to consider initiatives that would increase public education and awareness of racism, and to consider various methods by which a wide anti-racism lens can be applied during the development, implementation and evaluation of government policies, programs and services.”

I agree with this petition and will put my signature to it and give it to Radin.

LAKE NIPISSING WALLEYE FISHERY

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has stated that the walleye population in Lake Nipissing is in decline; and

“Whereas their answer is to manage through the recreational fishing regulations; and

“Whereas that is not a viable solution if the commercial fishery on Lake Nipissing is not regulated; and

“Whereas the Lake Nipissing Stakeholders Association wants to restock the lake at large volumes to replenish the waning walleye population, but is not being allowed to do so by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry despite the fact the ministry commits to stocking 1,200 other lakes in Ontario each and every year;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow the Lake Nipissing Stakeholders Association to restock Lake Nipissing with walleye to protect our local fishery for future generations.”

I sign my name to this petition, Speaker, and give it to page Konstantina.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I’d like to thank everybody from the northeast who has signed this petition, including Mrs. Roma Smith. It reads as follows:

“Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in homes within the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN) have been pressured to move out of the hospital to await placement, or stay and pay hospital rates of approximately \$1,000 per day; and

“Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie have been pressured to move to homes not of their choosing, or to

‘interim’ beds in facilities that don’t meet legislated standards for permanent long-term-care homes; and

“Whereas the practice of making patients remain in ‘interim’ beds is contrary to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) policy which identifies ‘interim’ beds as intended to ‘ensure a continuous flow-through so that interim beds are constantly freed up for new applicants from hospitals’;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“—Ensure health system officials are using ‘interim’ beds as ‘flow-through,’ in accordance with fairness and as outlined in MOHLTC policy;

“—Ensure patients aren’t pressured with hospital rates and fulfill promises made to hundreds of nursing home residents who agreed to move temporarily with the promise that they would be relocated as soon as a bed in a home of their choosing became available.”

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity prices have increased and in too many cases become unaffordable for Ontarians;

“Whereas Ontario is a prosperous province and people should never have to choose between hydro and other daily necessities;

“Whereas people want to know that hydro rate relief is on the way; that relief will go to everyone; and that relief will be lasting because it is built on significant change;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would reduce hydro bills for residential consumers, small businesses and farms by an average of 25% as part of a significant system restructuring, with increases held to the rate of inflation for the next four years;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would provide people with low incomes and those living in rural communities with even greater reductions to their electricity bills;

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

“Support the Ontario fair hydro plan and provide relief for Ontario electricity consumers as quickly as possible;

“Continue working to ensure clean, reliable and affordable electricity is available for all Ontarians.”

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Benjamin.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased to get up during your tenure in the chair, presenting this petition on behalf of thousands

of people in Oxford and the surrounding area. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the rightful purpose of Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to ‘provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.’ RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

“Whereas ‘all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.’—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

“That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario.”

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

GRANDVIEW CHILDREN’S CENTRE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition: “Grandview Children’s Centre Capital Need.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grandview Children’s Centre is Durham region’s only outpatient rehabilitation facility for children and youth with special needs; and

“Whereas Grandview Children’s Centre’s main facility was originally constructed in 1983 to serve 400 children and now has a demand of over 8,000 children annually; and

“Whereas growth has resulted in the need for lease locations leading to inefficient and fragmented care delivery; and

“Whereas it is crucial for Grandview Children’s Centre to complete a major development project to construct a new facility in order to meet the existing as well as future needs of Durham region’s children, youth and families; and

“Whereas in 2009 Grandview Children’s Centre submitted a capital development plan to the province to construct a new facility; and

1530

“Whereas in 2016 the town of Ajax donated a parcel of land on which to build the new Grandview; and

“Whereas the Grandview foundation has raised over \$8 million; and

“Whereas since 2009 the need for services has continued to increase, with over 2,753 children, youth and families currently on the wait-list for services;

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

“That the province of Ontario prioritizes, commits to and approves Grandview Children’s Centre’s capital development plan so that the chronic shortage of facilities in Durham can be alleviated.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Jack to bring to the Clerk.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity prices have increased and in too many cases become unaffordable for Ontarians;

“Whereas Ontario is a prosperous province and people should never have to choose between hydro and other daily necessities;

“Whereas people want to know that hydro rate relief is on the way; that relief will go to everyone; and that relief will be lasting because it is built on significant change;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would reduce hydro bills for residential consumers, small businesses and farms by an average of 25% as part of a significant system restructuring, with increases held to the rate of inflation for the next four years;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would provide people with low incomes and those living in rural communities with even greater reductions to their electricity bills;

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

“Support the Ontario fair hydro plan and provide relief for Ontario electricity consumers as quickly as possible;

“Continue working to ensure clean, reliable and affordable electricity is available for all Ontarians.”

I agree with this petition and I give it to page Kyra.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

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

“Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario; and

“Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015 and has cut essential rural school funding; and

“Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

“Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario; and

“Whereas the current PAR process forces bad behaviour by school boards to justify the replacement of high-maintenance outdated schools;

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

“(1) to support MPP Jim McDonell’s motion to suspend all current PAR reviews until a strategic rural education plan is completed, engaging all rural school boards, school communities and municipalities;

“(2) to reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

“(3) to engage all rural school boards, including the Upper Canada District School Board, school communities and municipalities in the development of the strategic rural education plan; and

“(4) consider rural education opportunities, student busing times, accessible extracurricular and inter-school activities, the schools’ role as a community hub and its value to the local economy.”

I agree with this wholeheartedly and will pass it off to page Mary.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Cindy Forster: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently reviewing employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change employment and labour laws to accomplish the following:

“—ensure that part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time permanent counterparts;

“—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

“—offer fair scheduling with proper advance notice;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temporary agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

“—end the practice of contract flipping, support wage protection and job security for workers when companies change ownership or contracts expire;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of the laws through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—all workers must be paid at least \$15 an hour, regardless of their age, student status, job or sector of employment.”

I support this petition and I will send it off with page Ismael.

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

A point of order from the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I believe you will find unanimous consent to revert back to introduction of bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Smith is seeking unanimous consent to revert back to introduction of bills. Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAX FAIRNESS FOR REALTORS ACT, 2017 LOI DE 2017 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ FISCALE POUR LES COURTIERS EN VALEURS IMMOBILIÈRES

Mr. Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 104, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 with respect to personal real estate corporations / *Projet de loi 104, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés par actions et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier relativement aux sociétés personnelles immobilières.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Does the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Smith, you have 12 minutes to do your statement—a brief statement. Not 12 minutes; a brief statement. I’ll take back 10 of that.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would like to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for co-sponsoring this bill along with me.

The bill amends the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002, to permit a personal real estate corporation to be registered as a broker or salesperson. A personal real estate corporation must be incorporated as a professional corporation under the Business Corporations Act and be authorized only to trade in real estate. It also permits a brokerage to pay a commission or other remuneration to a personal real estate corporation of an individual broker or salesperson that it employs.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE SOUTIEN À L'ENFANCE, À LA JEUNESSE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 6, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 89, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur les services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille,*

modifiant et abrogeant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased to rise today for the next 20 minutes and continue debate on Bill 89, Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, 2016. I will start with basically a brief overview and then delve into some specifics, Speaker.

The Child and Family Services Act is 32 years old. An update is well overdue. The purpose of the changes in this act is to protect vulnerable children and make sure that the child is at the centre of all decision-making. Children deserve a safe and loving home which respects them as individuals.

We support giving children rights and a voice in their own future. For too long there have been serious deficiencies in the system which have let our most vulnerable slip through the cracks, and in some cases we have seen death occur. I can point to Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson, who I will talk about a bit later, Speaker.

With respect to the changes in this bill, what this bill will bring, there is updated language in the bill which is consistent with the language used in the Ontario Human Rights Code. We see that as one of the basic changes.

This bill increases the age of child protection to include 16- and 17-year olds.

This bill will provide renewed emphasis on the treatment of indigenous children.

A final change is that there is additional oversight of children's aid societies and funding and accountability.

1540

Before I get into the specifics, though, I do have to address some additional points with respect to the Auditor General. As I said right at the onset, these changes are long overdue. While we're happy to see the government take action on this, it really does sadden us to know that it took three separate audits from the Auditor General before any substantial action was taken. After 13 years and audits in 2003, 2008 and again in 2016, the Auditor General found that the minister was still not monitoring the delivery of services to ensure that children were receiving adequate treatment. That is unacceptable in Ontario.

In 2016, the Auditor General found that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services had not been measuring "individual agency performance against targets, and does not effectively monitor client outcomes or overall program performance against measurable and meaningful targets." Again, that, at this stage, is simply unacceptable.

If we looked a little deeper into the 2016 Auditor General report—let's look at some of the facts. The auditor has highlighted four important points, the first being that "there is a risk that the mental health of children and youth can deteriorate while waiting for service, but little is done to monitor wait time trends and their impact." We believe and understand and trust what

the auditor is suggesting here about that additional risk to our youth.

The auditor also pointed that "agencies do not monitor and assess client outcomes to determine if clients benefited from the services they received." When you look at a key performance indicator—or KPI, as it's called in the financial sector—you need to measure it. You can't fix what you can't measure. That's why it's important to have an outcome determined.

The third point is that the "ministry does not fund agencies based on the current needs of children and youth served." Again, we go back to the fact that this act hasn't changed in 32 years. We go back to the fact that the auditor pointed this out in 2003, 2008 and 2016. Here we are today, and the ministry still does not fund based on the current needs.

The final fact from the Auditor General tells us that the "ministry does not monitor the performance of the program or agencies to facilitate corrective action," wherever it is deemed to be needed, "and does not collect data on all current ministry performance indicators." That's the KPI, or key performance indicators, that I spoke about. If you don't collect that data and you're still funding things and you know it's not at the right level, you're not going to be able to fund it properly without having a thorough understanding of what those performance indicators are. That's why we need to have the Auditor General's key facts acted upon, and acted upon quickly.

This part, Speaker, will be a little bit boring or pedestrian. I'm going to actually list all of the acts that are affected, because, as I say, it hasn't been touched in all of these decades. We are going to see that in Bill 89, supporting children, we're going to affect dozens upon dozens of acts here:

- the Assessment Act;
- the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act will be affected;
- the Child Care and Early Years Act will be affected;
- Child, Youth and Family Services Act;
- Children's Law Reform Act;
- Christopher's Law—that's the sex offender registry of 2000—will be affected;
- City of Toronto Act, 2006;
- Compensation for Victims of Crime Act;
- Coroners Act;
- Corporations Tax Act;
- Courts of Justice Act;
- Early Childhood Educators Act;
- the Education Act itself;
- the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act will be affected by this;
- French Language Services Act;
- Health Care Consent Act;
- Health Protection and Promotion Act;
- Intercountry Adoption Act;
- Jewish Family and Child Service of Metropolitan Toronto Act;
- Long-Term Care Homes Act;

—the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act will be affected;

—Ministry of Correctional Services Act;

—the Municipal Act—which we’re also working on in Bill 68 currently, which I spoke on this morning—is going to be affected in this bill as well, as well as it was affected in Bill 80 just before our winter break;

—Ontario Works Act;

—Pay Equity Act;

—Pension Benefits Act;

—Perpetuities Act;

—Personal Health Information Protection Act;

—Police Record Checks Reform Act;

—Private Hospitals Act;

—Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act;

—Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act;

—Residential Tenancies Act;

—Substitute Decisions Act;

—Vital Statistics Act; and, finally,

—the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act will also be affected.

As you can see, this is all-encompassing. It has taken a long time to get it here—decades. And now we’re about to embark on a tremendous amount of work that has been done and that will continue to be done. Then, hopefully, we can see additional work done through some amendments if this bill passes and gets into committee.

Basically, Speaker, I want to speak about part I, “Purposes.” Again, the purposes of this act—and there are many. But the beginning of “Purposes” is to support the integrity and autonomy of the family. This act at least appears to take the least disruptive actions. I think all in this House—and indeed, perhaps, in this province—believe that services to children and young persons should be provided in a manner that, first, respects a child’s need for continuity of care and for stable relationships with family and cultural environment. It should take into account the physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs. It should take into account a young person’s surroundings, whether it’s race or ancestry, their colour, their ethnic origin, and a long—indeed, a long list that must be taken into account with respect to children and youth. That would also include cultural and linguistic needs.

At the end of the day, when you include all, Speaker, it really needs to provide a service in a manner that builds on the strength of the families. That, I think, is the underlying essence of this. It should include the participation of the child or the young person, their parents, their extended family and indeed the community, if that is what it takes to achieve the end goals I think we all want. It should respect regional differences. It should build on the strengths that we find in families.

It should recognize the culture, the heritage, the tradition, the connection to community and concept of extended family for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children. This act is going to begin to recognize a lot of these, Speaker, because a lot has happened in 32 years.

1550

I want to talk again for a moment about the children’s and young persons’ rights. This act actually outlines the rights of children and the young persons who are receiving services.

This will allow the youth, as defined, to express their own views freely and safely about matters that affect them. You can tell, Speaker, this is not something that may have occurred 30 years ago. This is a positive change.

The children and the young people are to be engaged through an honest and respectful dialogue about how and why decisions that affect them are made, and to have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Again, you would not have seen this 30 years ago.

The children are to be consulted on the nature of the services provided, or to be provided, to them and advised of the decisions made in respect of those services.

It’s interesting, Speaker. I watched an episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* last night, and it really did address this in the most interesting way. As I say, I’ve talked for almost 15 minutes; I’ve got five more minutes to go—but a few lines from the show last night encapsulated everything we were talking about. There was a young child who was in crisis and was able to be brought in to speak directly to a judge. The judge and the prosecutors talked about the fact that had this happened only X years ago, a generation ago, 20 years ago, the judge would not be able to speak to that young child. He or she would have to speak to the prosecutor and/or the parents, but never to the child. But last night they talked in the episode about how they can actually speak to the child now.

So much has evolved; so much has changed. As I was preparing this, I was thinking when I saw the show last night, “My gosh, that’s exactly what I’m going to be talking about tomorrow afternoon.” And here it is. Whether it’s life replicating art or art replicating life, we’re all catching up, and I think that’s really the message that I want to see delivered today.

As I continue talking about the children’s and young persons’ rights, the fourth point would be to be able to raise concerns or recommend changes with respect to the services provided or to be provided to them without interference or fear of coercion, discrimination or reprisal.

They will be informed in language suitable to their understanding. Again, we talked about that earlier, in which some of those languages and cultures include—they will be informed about their rights, under this section.

They will be informed, in language suitable to their understanding, of the existence and role of their Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and how the provincial advocate may be contacted. Again, Speaker, many people may have already thought this occurs, but it doesn’t.

These are changes that are going to allow those things to be able to happen, where we can speak directly to the youth and the children who are affected.

This part also prohibits service providers and foster parents from using corporal punishment. If you can imagine, we need to have this written. And that corporal punishment includes detention in a locked room and use of mechanical restraints. It's interesting that here we are in 2017, and we're addressing this today, Speaker.

Children also have a right to be heard with respect to the decisions that will affect them with respect to treatment, education, training or work, creed, community, identity and cultural identity, discharge from a residential placement or transfer.

They will also have the right to have their views given due weight. They count. Their views will matter.

Again, they have the right to be informed in language suitable to their understanding.

They have a right to a plan of care within 30 days.

The youth and children will be able to participate in the development of their plan. They will receive meals that are well balanced. They will be provided with good-quality clothing, will receive medical and dental care, will receive education that corresponds to their aptitudes and abilities, will participate in recreational and athletic activities.

Speaker, earlier, I went through the dozens of acts that will be affected, and these are but a few. I wanted to focus on these first because I wasn't sure how long I would spend in the preamble. But I think it is important—at least, it's important to me—to talk about the endgame here. This is all about the children, the youth, and what is needed for them and what has been lacking in some cases for them. I really believe that this act—we do have amendments that we will be bringing forward should this bill pass and get to committee stage. I hope that as much careful attention is given to the amendments as was obviously paid in drafting and crafting this bill. It's important.

Again, as I said earlier, it's long overdue. The auditor was very clear almost 14 years ago—2003, 2008, 2016. I look forward to an audit report when the auditor sums up the various committee work and the various acts that have been passed, and I'm looking forward to the check mark in this part of the Auditor General's report, whether it's December 2017 or beyond.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member from Nipissing and his depiction of Bill 89, and I picked up on a few things that he was talking about. One was the framework and the basis of Bill 89, and that is Katelynn's Principle. Ensuring that a child is heard, listened to, respected, has an opinion is supposed to be basis of this bill. Quite frankly, probably where the bill stemmed from was after the inquest about Katelynn Sampson.

We'll start with the preamble. The preamble is strong and talks about all of the principles that need to be enacted and what the meaning of the bill is, but when we get to the actual bill, in the legislation there's no teeth. If you don't read the preamble, you would never understand

any of the principles of Katelynn's Principle. You wouldn't see any of that. It's not reflected in the bill. I'm not the only person who is saying that. All of the stakeholders who I've met with feel the same thing. There's nothing to actually uphold those standards, to measure the standards, to enforce the standards. There's no teeth in the bill to actually make sure that children are listened to and that they must be listened to and that they must be respected. That's a big concern that we have as New Democrats.

I've heard from stakeholders that they would like to see Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle, be a companion piece of legislation to Bill 89, to actually put some teeth into it, and to give it an underlying basis of something that people could grab on to, and to know that speaking and listening to and ensuring that children's needs are met and respected would be the most important part of enacting Bill 89. So Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle—a companion piece of legislation.

1600

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to also acknowledge my staff, Jaclynne Hamel and Rosa Gutierrez, who have joined us in the gallery today.

I'd like to start out by thanking the member from Nipissing for his comments on this bill. He's obviously very thoroughly looked at it and checked into each section, and I will respond later on to some of the other comments that have been brought forward. What I do want to focus on is the Auditor General's report on children and youth mental health agencies. I want to briefly respond to just this aspect of the bill for the moment.

Over the last five years, our government has been working hard to simplify the mental health care system for children and youth. We have introduced the Ontario mental health and addictions strategy and the Moving on Mental Health strategy. Through Moving on Mental Health, my ministry has established 31 of 33 areas across the province to make it easier for families to know what services are available and how to access them.

Specifically on Moving on Mental Health, it defines the common mental health services that must be available to everyone in the province, no matter where the child or the youth lives. Where there are lead agencies responsible for the delivery of these services, we need to make it easier for people to know where to go and how to access that help.

The mental health and addictions strategy will support the creation of local service pathways through community-level planning across the sector. Community mental health agencies are working with the health and education sectors, such as hospitals and schools, to better coordinate service and supports.

I know that we continue to look at those areas and we will do more work in that area going forward.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you to the member from Nipissing for his very thoughtful comments on Bill 89

here this afternoon. No system is perfect. However, I think the vast majority of people who have made their way through our children's aid societies have come out with positive results—but certainly not 100%. I know that in my region, the former Prince Edward County Children's Aid Society a few years ago had some very, very serious charges laid at a number of foster homes where children were abused. You hate to see that type of thing happen, and that's why it's so necessary to update the legislation here that's taken 32 years to get to this point, with Bill 89—and it's not perfect either. There are some amendments that need to be made.

There are many volunteers in our community, though, who need to be commended for the work that they do in volunteering their time to make sure that some of our most vulnerable children have the most positive experience they can get. Just on Saturday night at the Sears Atrium in Belleville, we had the annual Guardian Angel Gala, which is put on by the local Children's Foundation, the charitable arm of the Highland Shores Children's Aid Society. We honoured a couple of volunteers from Trenton. Ken and Cynthia Schmidt were awarded their guardian angel wings—they're the owners of the McDonald's restaurants in Trenton and Brighton—for the work that they do in ensuring that the children in our community have a better chance at life, particularly those who are wards of the CAS and in foster homes.

I commend all of the volunteers, those who help raise money to help our most vulnerable children and those who sit on the boards. We need those types of volunteers on the boards at our children's aid societies. We thank them for the work that they're doing in our community, and we thank the member for Nipissing for his comments this afternoon as well.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Before I begin, I think we need to give a lot of credit to our colleague from the New Democratic Party the member from Hamilton Mountain for her tremendous leadership on this file. She's been a strong champion and advocate for issues impacting young people, and I think she deserves a lot of acknowledgement for that.

She's actually pointed out some key issues. Any time you want to address a problem and you enact legislation that seeks to address the problem—whether it's the fair treatment of children or ensuring that children are kept at the centre of all discussions in all decisions—that legislation is only as strong as the enforcement. If there isn't enforcement, if there isn't a way to ensure that the policies or the preamble are actually implemented, then the legislation doesn't really have the impact that we want.

As it stands, one of the key criticisms that has been outlined by my colleague is that, sure, the preamble might be strong; sure, the language indicates the importance of putting the child at the centre of the discussion, but where are the remedies? Where are the measures to ensure that this is enforced? How can we ensure that

every decision is actually followed through in this manner? What is the accountability in cases where it doesn't actually happen that way? What are the remedies in those circumstances?

We know that there have been some horrible examples of mistreatment of children in our province. This is something that we all share responsibility in. As legislators, we have to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

We have an opportunity now to remedy and rectify these problems, but we can't do that unless we have legislation that's strong. I think the suggestion that there is a companion piece—ensuring that the private member's bill, Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle, acts as a companion to ensure there is the enforcement—is a strong recommendation. I encourage the government to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing has two minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I also want to thank the speakers from Hamilton Mountain, Kingston and the Islands, Prince Edward–Hastings and Bramalea–Gore–Malton for their added commentary.

I want to thank a couple of other people here today, certainly one who is here now. Our MPP from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry had brought a private member's bill, Bill 32, the Right to Care Act (Children 16 Years of Age and Older), in 2016, and former MPP Rod Jackson's Bill 8—which, at the time of discussion, had passed second reading, had passed committee during the last Parliament, and had all-party support. It also had proposed very similar steps.

Mr. McDonnell's bill summary said, "At a challenging time during their development, 16- and 17-year-olds deserve the right to access care services if they need them. The alternative could be youth homelessness or a deterioration of their physical and mental health, which prevent them from achieving their potential and affect local communities."

Speaker, we know that the expansion of the age of protection to age 16 and 17 has been widely called for by stakeholders, by children and by our very own members. Bill 89 does indeed require a children's aid society to protect children aged 16 and 17, while the previous PC private members' bills I spoke of offered children the option of children's aid society protection.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure, as it always is my pleasure, to rise to share some thoughts on any legislation before this House. Today, we're speaking about Bill 89, the Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act.

Speaker, in the last—well, even today, in fact, we've heard people talking about the education system and children in the education system. I had a ministerial briefing on the Family Responsibility Office and the importance of support payments and what that means to the children who are supposed to benefit from those support payments, and now we're talking about a piece

of legislation speaking about children in care. I think it's important to highlight the common theme, which is children.

If there was any doubt in anybody's mind, with the amount of discussion that we have about children in this House, even specifically for me today, it is crystal clear how important children are to our province and how important it is that we as adults and as legislators ensure that children are supported and that they're protected so that they can grow up and go on to be whatever it is they want to be and do what they want to do—including, for some of them, standing where we are today and doing the job that we're doing.

1610

I would like to start by commending my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, who is our critic for children and youth services, on the work that she has done specifically around the issue we're addressing today, but on children's issues in general. She is a tireless advocate for the youth of this province. I know that it is something that is very near and dear to her heart. I want to commend her for the incredible work that she has been doing.

Speaker, because I'm speaking about my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, it's important to point out that last year she brought forward a bill, Bill 57, called Katelynn's Principle. It was specifically addressing children in care, and how, when decisions are being made on their behalf, they have to be included in that process. They have to have a voice and consideration in that process. It is paramount that when adults are making decisions for children in care, that they actually get to know those children, that they have conversations with them, that they listen to what the needs, the desires, the thoughts of these children are and base their decisions around that.

Now, I'm not talking about—any of us who have children know our kids will come to us to and tell us that they need to have that candy, that new video game, that specific brand of jeans. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about when a child is in care and they're expressing that they're struggling with a particular issue while in care, that needs to be taken into consideration, that needs to weigh heavily when it comes to the decisions that are being made on their behalf.

When I had an opportunity to speak to my colleague's bill, I shared a very personal story. It was around the fact that I myself am adopted. When I was placed for adoption, I was not immediately put into the home of the family that raised me. I actually went into foster care for a year. So I spent some time in care.

The point that I was making when I was talking about my own personal story—because I can honestly tell you that, at a year old, I don't remember what it was like to be in care. I don't remember the foster home, although I can tell you that my foster parents were fantastic. They took notes. They talked about the dog and my relationship with their dog, with their two boys—so my foster brothers. They wrote down my eating schedule, my sleeping schedule, the things that made me laugh, the

things that made me cry, so that when I was placed into a home, they were able to give that information to my forever family. They were, from what I can tell, wonderful people, but I don't personally remember being in care.

What I do know is that because of the work of the foster family, because of being placed in a forever home, I had an opportunity to go on and do whatever I wanted to. Some days I walk into this building and I think, "How the heck did I get here?" How did someone like me land in a place like this doing the job that I'm doing knowing where I've come from and some of the struggles that I've had? The answer to that is it's because of the support that I've received. It's because there were people along the way who actually consulted me and asked me as a child what it was I wanted, what my thoughts were on certain topics, what I wanted to be when I grew up and how they could support me to get me to where I am.

I think that's really the core of what my colleague's bill was trying to address: that we need to make sure that children in care are getting the same opportunity that I had, getting the same considerations, getting the same supports that I received so that they can go on to maybe someday do the job that I'm doing, and hopefully make a difference in the lives of other children.

The bill before us, Bill 89—as it has been pointed out, the preamble says all the right things. It says everything that it needs to say. Unfortunately, when you really get into the bill, into the meat of it, there's not a lot of substance. There are not a lot of actionable items. There are not a lot of teeth in the bill. That's rather unfortunate, because it is the lives of children that we're talking about, and trying to give them the best opportunity so we don't find another case like Katelynn. Katelynn didn't have the opportunity that I have. Unfortunately, Katelynn will never have the opportunity to stand and do what I'm doing. When we're looking at legislation like this, we need to make sure that it's really good, solid, comprehensive legislation so that we never, ever have to find ourselves talking about another child like Katelynn, whose life ended well before it should have, and needlessly.

We also need to be talking about making sure there is funding in place to support anything that's in the legislation. So to say this is what we want to do, this is what we're going to do, and the people that are put in the position of having to fulfill the legislation that we enact—if we're going to make people actually do these things, we need to make sure the funding is in place to provide them with the opportunity, the tools they need to actually do the job and do it well. What we are finding is that more and more funding is being dialed back, it's being cut, and the workloads of those front-line workers, those that would actually have to fulfill what we've put in legislation, are increasing, but they don't have the tools to do their job. They are finding themselves more and more stretched and they are unable to reach the children and help the children that they really want to help and that they're meant to help.

A case in point: the CAS workers, CUPE Local 2049, who are currently locked out. They are in Nipissing and

Parry Sound, and they're currently locked out. It's important to point out that when they are locked out, that means they are not able to provide service to these children. We have children who are vulnerable to begin with, and now they're in an even more precarious or unstable environment because they don't have the supports, the workers that they need in place. And rather than using the skilled workers, those that actually know the work and have been trained to provide the services—instead of having them, there have been replacement workers brought in, people who don't have the education or the knowledge or the skills to navigate the system and help these children.

For these workers that are currently locked out, one of their biggest concerns that they brought forward is workload and not being given the tools that they need, or the time, frankly, that they need to provide the services to make sure that children who are in care are safe and are thriving. I think that's a really sad statement to make.

When we're talking about the protection and the safety of children, that's something to be taken incredibly seriously. We do need to make sure, and this legislation does not do that—it doesn't talk about funding that system properly; it doesn't talk about supporting the workers in the system, the front-line workers that are actually going to service and help these children. This legislation doesn't offer any of that. I believe it was a missed opportunity on the part of the government to really look at the system and, rather than put a preamble in that sounds great and talks about all the right things, actually put legislation in place that includes all of the tools that not only the front-line workers need but, frankly, Speaker, the tools that these children need to be able to thrive in the environment that they are put in and go on to do incredible things.

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to acknowledge the member from Hamilton Mountain, belatedly, and the member, as well, from Windsor West for your very thoughtful words on the bill. To the member from Hamilton Mountain, I would also like to acknowledge you for your past work in this area.

We certainly have been talking about and been concerned about Katelynn's Principle and Jordan's Principle. It is something that we are very, very focused on. We have added a new statement of rights of children and young persons which includes the right to express their own views freely and safely about matters that affect them. This is obviously something that is extremely important and we feel very strongly about.

They also need to be engaged through that honest and respectful dialogue. They need to know why and how decisions affect them and be able to have an opportunity to give some feedback on those suggestions. I know, for myself, when I was younger, I certainly thought that I should have everything to do with anything that related to me, much to my parents' chagrin.

Anyway, they need to be consulted, and we know that. They need to know about the nature of the services that

are going to be provided to them and be able to give some feedback.

1620

We have amended the child's right to be informed in a language that is suitable to their understanding of their rights and of the existence of the Office of Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. This is also another extremely important feature of this bill.

I look forward to continuing the discussion and hearing from the other members on this bill.

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to get up to respond, on behalf of my residents, to the member from Windsor West, who brings up a lot of good issues. There's nothing more important than our children, and we have to make sure that we look after them. Sometimes things take a little longer than they should, that's for sure. I think everybody in this Legislature probably has some horror stories of things that have happened in their communities when it comes to young children—it doesn't matter where you're from.

But sometimes there is good news, and I want to commend one of the communities in my riding, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, whose child services were recognized for being able to place 100% of their children successfully last year. They were recognized—actually, I believe it was by New York state—for the achievement. Akwesasne looks after New York, Ontario and Quebec, so it's a little bit of an anomaly when it comes to a municipality. But it certainly took those services back and has been very successful in providing them in their own community.

It just goes to show that there are good ways of doing things and there are positive things in front of us, and with today's technology we should be able to move to those places faster. We should be able to look around, and instead of reinventing the wheel all the time, try to go to places where they've been successful, to see what's working and look on improving those. Instead of rebuilding—we talk about the CPIN computer program, another example of building something from scratch and it doesn't work. The government has a record of being unable to handle IT programs. Go to somebody where it's working. Let's look at the small improvements that take a successful operation and make it better.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Before I get into my colleague from Windsor West's few comments, I want to bring up Monique Taylor, who's here this afternoon, who brought forward a bill, Katelynn's Principle. When I look in this Legislature, we all care about our kids and we all care about what's going on. But I think the passion that Monique brings to this House every time she talks about children—I just want to say congratulations, and, yes, it should be incorporated in the bill.

As far as Lisa Gretzky talking about—and Katelynn's Principle is the sad part and a tragic part of what some-

times can happen. But I listened with interest to Lisa Gretzky's story, because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Just a polite reminder that you have to say the riding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I apologize, Speaker. You're absolutely right: the member from Windsor West.

What happened there is that a family took in a young girl who really needed some support, some guidance, some help and loved her like she was their own. She grew up, went to school, obviously, got an education, and became a wonderful young lady—as we celebrate International Women's Day. And when you look around here—and we should all be proud of this—there are 107 people out of 14 million who sit in this chamber. Think about that. The member from Windsor West, because of that family—because that family gave her a hand up, because of that family caring about her—was able to live a relatively good life. She ended up getting married, with two wonderful kids, a great husband. But it was because of that family that cared enough to give her a hand up.

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

M. Shafiq Qadri: J'ai le plaisir et aussi la responsabilité de soutenir le projet de loi 89.

It's a pleasure, Speaker, to speak on this particular bill, Bill 89, as you will know. I thank my honourable colleagues, particularly the MPP from Windsor West, for sharing her own very personal family details, which harken back to perhaps what we're all attempting to achieve here: offering appropriate and compassionate care to children who, for many reasons, leave their biological families and yet find loving homes. We welcome individuals. I was surprised to learn that, I believe, the MPP from Barrie on our side also shares a very similar story.

There are a number of things that one can mention in this particular bill: the wide consultation that occurred across Ontario, hearing from stakeholders in the health, legal, child welfare, youth justice, mental health and other domains.

I'm especially heartened to realize that, amongst the many components of this bill—not only the stewardship of the extraordinary number of records—40 million-plus—in the Child Protection Information Network, but also, I would say, the added sensitivity, empathy and compassion displayed to our First Nations communities.

As you will know, the Premier of the province, the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, whenever she makes any kind of major speech, tends to recognize that we are on, for example, the traditional territory of the Mississaugas and that they were essentially the rightful owners originally. With that, we are now attempting, in this program here and this bill, to maintain the same level of sensitivity to our First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. Of course, there are a number of programs and parts to that, which we'll speak about subsequently.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor West: two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank everybody who got up and added a comment. If I recognized all of their

ridings, it would take my full two minutes. I think they all have long riding titles.

I just want to reiterate that it's so important that children in care actually have a voice and consideration when it actually comes to their care. Like I shared in my story, there are many children like Katelynn who, unfortunately, wouldn't have the opportunity that I've had, and they should be afforded that opportunity. They should be able to express when they're put in a home or in a position that they're not comfortable with. They should be able to say if they're not being treated in a way that they're comfortable with. They should be able to express themselves.

We have to remember in this place that often we think at such a high level. We tend to think inside a box when we're in here talking about legislation. We have to think outside that box. We have to put ourselves in the position of the people whom we're actually making laws about, the people who are going to be affected by the laws that we make.

In this case, we're talking about children. Just because they're children doesn't mean that their thoughts, their concerns and their ideas should be discredited in any way, shape or form. In fact, they should be embraced. They should have a big say in legislation like this, along with those who work in the community agencies—those who provide supports and services to these children. They should have a large say in this. Unfortunately, I don't feel that that's the case. But I also think that Bill 57, if they were to pass that, would go a long way to making sure that children would have a voice.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Bill 89, on child, youth and family services, really is a bill that is very non-partisan in nature. This bill would be a great opportunity, I believe, for the Ontario Legislature to show the very best attributes of the 107 members, who represent a great diversity right across the province of Ontario. I was struck certainly by the very personal story by the member for Windsor West. That kind of personal experience is invaluable as you try to frame a piece of legislation that is about doing everything possible for what I might say is Ontario's most precious resource, our children.

1630

Just reflecting on the story of the member from Windsor West, probably one of my best friends in Peterborough, Glenn Pagett, who served with me on Peterborough city council, and his wife, Velma, had their first son, Joel, who was by birth their son. Then there were some medical complications that they couldn't have any other children. So they adopted a fine young girl, Julie, whom I got to know extremely well through my association with the Pagett family.

I remember quite vividly chatting with Glenn and Velma when it came to a point in Julie's life where Glenn

and Velma wanted to introduce Julie to her actual birth parents. That's a very, very emotional situation for a 17-year-old—Julie was 17 at the time—to finally get introduced to her birth parents. Glenn and Velma really provided the great basis for that to happen. I remember going through that with the Pagett family.

Again, it's about how these things evolve and how that gives you great experience in life, and certainly with Bill 89.

My last term on Peterborough city council was between 2000 and 2003, before I got elected to the Ontario Legislature. I was one of the council's representatives on the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. That for me was a great personal experience in order to see the phenomenal work that is done by children's aid societies in terms of crown wards and looking at foster families, as the member from Windsor West describes so well, to provide that nurturing framework and that important foundation, a basis for character, as one certainly evolves through life.

I talk to my wife, Karan, frequently about these matters. She is a principal at St. Patrick elementary school in Peterborough. From time to time, she has students who are involved with the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. We must all work together to make sure that we look after our children each and every day.

Again, I think this is a rare opportunity, a rare opportunity in Bill 89 for all sides to work together. It will go through, I have no doubt, with a series of amendments, if all sides collectively work together to make sure that this becomes a great piece of legislation that all 107 members can take pride in, because we're doing something fundamental, important and caring for every Ontarian, almost 14 million Ontarians, to do our best to make sure that we provide this kind of commitment to our children.

Mr. Speaker, you well know—your wife is a teacher—that every time we get the opportunity to go into elementary schools and secondary schools just to see the kind of talent that's really there—I'm often asked, "What does the future look like for Ontario?" I always assure everybody, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the future is in good hands with those young men and women who are in elementary and secondary school.

We have an opportunity. You know, one of my great political advisers is my son Braden, who is 18 years old. He likes to chat with me on a day-to-day basis. I value his opinions highly when he's giving Dad some very sage advice when it comes to public policy in the province of Ontario. When you are in classrooms and you just take the time—as I know you have, Mr. Speaker, and all 107 members—to sit down beside and chat with the kids, you learn something important each and every day. I think, as I said, that we have a real opportunity, through Bill 89, for all members of this Legislature to do something very, very important that we could all take pride in.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn it over to my colleague the hard-working member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for leading this off, and to the member from Windsor West—her story was very moving.

Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to be able to rise in support of Bill 89, the Child, Youth and Family Services Act. As we heard, it has been over 30 years since this act was last revised. How the world has changed; how our attitude to children, to families has evolved in that time.

Many of the provisions in this act are indeed long overdue: increasing the age of protection to 16- and 17-year-olds; affirming the rights of children; affirming Katelynn's Principle in this legislation, that children have a voice, have a right to be respected and have a right to participate in the process of decision-making around their care, their placement and their treatment.

It's also very important to me personally that expectations for how service providers are supposed to conduct themselves are a part of this bill. My wife and I went through the adoption process, and while the outcome was fabulous—a beautiful, healthy, wonderful daughter—the process itself was awful. At many times, there were comments that were completely inappropriate. There was information that was misleading. There was information that was withheld. The important thing was to focus on our daughter, which we did, and as I said, everything worked out fine, but that's in our case. There might be other cases where it would not be so. That's why it's important that this legislation moves forward.

As has been said earlier, this is a piece of legislation that all members in this House, all sides in this House, I'm confident, will work on together. This is not a partisan issue in any way. This is about our children. Everybody in this room was a child, of course, or a parent or a grandparent, and we all understand how important it is to include our children in these decisions.

Aspects of this bill which I think are incredibly important are enshrining the CPIN in it and the ability to track children, track children's history, track children's care, track the interactions that various service providers would have with the child over the course of their young life to ensure that nobody falls through the cracks again—so incredibly important. As I said, to me and my wife the knowledge that the government will have more ability to hold service providers and children's aid societies to account as to how they conduct themselves is incredibly important.

We're in second reading on this legislation. It will move on to committee. I'm confident that there will be many well-thought-out amendments that will be brought forward as we think long and hard on how we can best protect our most vulnerable children who are in the care of these societies.

We know that children who are given supports early on and throughout each stage of their development become successful. They don't become a burden on

themselves or on the rest of society. That is why getting this right is so incredibly important. I am proud to be participating in the development of this most needed reform to this legislation.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to get up and to respond to the comments by the governing party.

One of the disappointments in this whole thing is the time taken to put in place a tracking computer program. I think we were saying it's something that started around 2012, and it's still not in place—or I shouldn't say that. It's in place in a few locations, but they're saying it will be 2020, 2021 to finish this.

I go back to a case that I'm aware of back in our own neighbourhood, where I guess what you'd call a bad player was involved with dealing with children, was close to getting identified in another area and so moved into our community, and got identified by accident by somebody who was visiting the house to drop something off and noticed the children and the state they were in. Of course the police were called and the person was identified and charged.

1640

There was an article about a month after that talking about this family and saying it was the worst case in the history of Quebec for child abuse. When they were close to getting caught, they simply moved into Ontario. It talks about the importance of not only having a tracking system, but having the ability to correspond with other areas.

Unfortunately, that happened I'm going to say 25 years ago or more, but here we are in 2017 and we still haven't got a tracking system in place. It was one of the major criticisms of the report of seven, eight years ago.

I think that we're going to look back in 2021 and they're going to herald the fact that they finally finished it, but there's an importance to it and I think we have to get on with it.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I wish I had the same 10 minutes that the minister and the member from Etobicoke Centre had, because there's so much to talk about in what you said. I totally agree with both of those members that this isn't a partisan piece of legislation. This is something that we need to work on together to ensure that we get it right.

That is why we've also brought forward the suggestion of possibly travelling the bill. I know that historically, before I was here, a lot of bills used to be travelled. That's because public input right across the entire province is an important piece of getting things right. When we're doing something as large as replacing an entire act, that's something I hope the government will take into consideration. I understand they feel that they have timelines and constraints, and they want to be able to make those timelines, but making the timelines with a poor piece of legislation won't be good enough for the people of Ontario.

I wanted to hit on what the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore talked about. Thank you for bringing your own personal story into this House and talking about the adoption process and how that was for your family.

There is a change within the new bill that will bring a separate entity into the adoption process. I've heard from stakeholders that they have concerns about that. Who will know that child? Who will understand that child? Who will be able to make the best decision? Is it going to be a private company? We just don't have details of what that's going to look like. It makes those parts of the legislation very difficult to be able to discuss and to be able to debate, when we don't actually know what those details look like.

A lot of that is happening within this legislation, a lot is being left to regulation, so there is so much conversation to be had. I hope that we really have the time to debate it and the time to get it through committee that it needs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kingston and the Islands.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you very much to the other speakers from Peterborough, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Hamilton Mountain.

I want to just touch quickly on a couple of things that have been brought up. I do want to mention that—yes, you're correct, CPIN would be implemented by 2020. I know that our children's aid society in Kingston and the Islands has gone forward with the CPIN program, and it's a challenge for staff. I have been hearing from the staff. I know it's difficult to change the way that you're using data-processing systems, so I think it's important to be sensitive to how that's rolled out and to make sure that it happens as smoothly as possible. But I do thank you for bringing that forward.

With respect to the revisions on the bill, the CFSA was first proclaimed in 1985—that is correct—and since 2000 there has been a legislative requirement to review the CFSA every five years. But a comprehensive revision has not been done since that time, since its assent, and this certainly is an extremely large revision, which we're very pleased to do.

We're also very pleased to hear the support that is coming forward from all sides. I agree with the member from Hamilton Mountain and the member from Peterborough: It is not a partisan bill. It is something that we all need to get behind.

I do also want to acknowledge my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I was really taken with his story about the adoption that occurred in his family; I didn't know that before.

I think that our government is committed to helping more children find that stability in good adoption arrangements and relationships that are meaningful to them.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to speak again to Bill 89 and bring some remarks. I'll have the opportunity to

speaking for 10 minutes about this bill a little bit later on, and I know you're looking forward to that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the members opposite who shared their time, bringing some remarks on Bill 89.

In the comments that were made following the presentations by the minister and the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, there was the issue of the CPIN that was brought up again.

This is one of the things that really boggles my mind when it comes to government getting involved with technology. It seems like, for whatever reason—and I'm not trying to be critical here, but I want to understand why technology and government don't seem to evolve as quickly as technology in the private sector. We've seen so many examples over the years, whether it's eHealth and the amount of time it's taken—I know it's a complex system, and there are a lot of medical records, and there are a lot of people involved, and Ontario is a very large jurisdiction. But it blows my mind, how long it takes and how expensive it is for the government of Ontario to move into technology.

We saw it with the SAMS system in our Comsoc sector, and how there was a terrible, terrible launch of SAMS that created chaos, not just for the clients in that sector but also the employees who work in that sector, and why it didn't work, and so much more money had to be invested in that.

Now we're hearing the same thing with the CPIN. It's taking longer to get it up and running, and it's obviously going to cost more.

In the private sector, technology seems to move ahead at the speed of light, but whenever government wants to get involved in technology, it seems to take forever and cost a lot of money. I think we saw it with the e-petitions and what's happening on the e-petition front. It's going to cost far too much money.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank colleagues on all sides: the honourable members from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Hamilton Mountain, Kingston and the Islands, of course, and Prince Edward–Hastings.

It's great that my friend the member from Wellington–Halton Hills is here today, because if you want to talk about technology, we could tell stories from the last three decades in the province of Ontario about governments of all political stripes that seemed to have trouble with the implementation of technology. I remember that we had difficulty in the city of Peterborough when we introduced new technology.

But I'd rather move away from that, Mr. Speaker, in my summation today.

This is a unique opportunity. I remember that last Saturday, I was at the Peterborough farmers' market, picking up some Brussels sprouts and some turnip. I was chatting with people there, and they came up to me and they said, "You know what, Jeff? From time to time, we tune in"—in Peterborough, it's on Cogeco, channel 95—"to see the proceedings of the Ontario Legislature. Why

can't you just work together?" They see the give-and-take, and that's part of our democracy.

But, Mr. Speaker, this time around, Bill 89 gives us a wonderful opportunity and, I would hope, maybe in terms of the debate, all 107 members will have the opportunity to speak on that bill, because we all have kids, in 107 ridings across this province. This is a bill that potentially will have a great impact, from a very positive perspective, for our children in the province of Ontario.

Let's take this opportunity. We'll certainly look at amendments. The member from Hamilton Mountain talked about the bill travelling. That's certainly out of my purview. That would be a discussion among the House leaders. But this is a good opportunity for all 107 members to come together to craft a really important piece of legislation.

1650

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to join in this debate this afternoon in this Legislature on second reading of Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2016, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

Of course, we've been debating this bill for some time. It was first introduced in this House before Christmas, on December 8, 2016. We've been debating it since the House resumed sitting. It was called for debate on February 22, March 1, March 6, and here we are today.

This is a very, very important piece of legislation, and I would say that at the outset. I think that, of all the responsibilities that the provincial government has—and we have significant responsibilities—the protection of vulnerable children has to be amongst the highest priorities. We all know of situations that have arisen over the years that are very troubling, very tragic, very sad, and obviously, the legislative framework has to be in place to ensure the level of protection that these vulnerable children need. That's why I think that we've got to take great care with this issue.

This bill is long—270 pages. We're going to have to ensure, when the bill goes to committee, that it receives adequate public hearings and clause-by-clause scrutiny to ensure that everything is done as it should be.

I would say, at the outset, that we support this bill in principle, and we expect it to pass because it's a government bill. From the debate I've heard so far, it seems that all members of the House—who have spoken, at least—in all caucuses support the bill in principle and believe that, after 32 years, we do need to update this piece of legislation.

But again, the bill needs to go to a standing committee, and it needs to have public hearings and there needs to be, as I said, very, very close scrutiny by all members of the House. I would hope that that can take place.

So why do we support it, Mr. Speaker? Again, our caucus believes that, because of the fact that the Child and Family Services Act is 32 years old, changes are

needed to ensure that our most vulnerable children are protected and provided the best service possible, and that these changes are long overdue.

We believe that, for many years, many organizations and stakeholders have pointed to the ongoing issues with the child welfare system. The Auditor General has laid out problems with the ministry's accountability in three different audits—2003, 2008 and 2016—and expressed concerns on a number of occasions. Obviously, this Legislature needs to respond to those legitimate concerns that have been expressed.

We believe that children deserve a safe and loving home, which respects them as individuals. We support giving children rights and a voice in their future. For too long, we believe, there have been serious deficiencies in the system, which have let some of our most vulnerable children literally slip through the cracks and, in some cases, caused their tragic deaths.

A couple of names that keep coming up in this debate. We think of Katelynn Sampson, who was seven years old, lived in Parkdale and tragically died in August 2008. She was in the care of two legal guardians who had been given custody of her, and they were ultimately charged with her murder. Katelynn died of septic shock. To read the story of Katelynn Sampson, as I did again today—and I recall reading about it when the newspaper stories initially appeared—it is so tragic that it brings you to tears.

We also think of a little boy, Jeffrey Baldwin, who lived in Toronto and, at the age of five, died tragically in 2013 in the care of his grandparents, who, in turn, were charged with his murder.

Again, it's the saddest details you can ever imagine when you read these stories, just imagining the circumstances that these poor children were in. We as a society, we as a government, we as children's aid societies weren't able to step in and do what needed to be done to protect these children. There are other examples. Those are two that come to mind and that have been talked about recently.

I do, though, want to express my appreciation to Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County and the staff and volunteers who support that agency, as well as the Halton Children's Aid Society. I represent, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the town of Halton Hills, so I have an involvement with both of those agencies. I think that their staff are outstanding professionals who are caring, compassionate and are doing a great job on behalf of the families and children in our community. I also believe that, through the support of volunteers, there is great work being done.

I would also want to point out the foster parents, of course, who do incredible work in our communities. I think of my friends Gord and Wilma Tosh from Rockwood, who have been foster parents for more than 30 years and have fostered 80 children over that time, in addition to the two naturally born children that they've had. They're an incredible couple. I've known them for years because of their multiple involvements in our

community. They deserve enormous credit for what they've done for the people of Ontario. It's interesting how they keep in touch with many of these children, who are now adults. Many of them still call them Mom and Dad, which is really a heartwarming story. So there are great stories of success. Even though we talk about where the system has failed, there are great success stories that we need to remember as well.

There are issues that need to be discussed in the course of second reading debate on this bill, most likely at committee as well. The question of whether or not we should be encouraging the amalgamation of children's aid societies; whether or not bigger is better—bigger might be more efficient or less efficient; whether or not communities lose their voice if we have bigger agencies: Those are serious questions. I think that, before we enter into discussions of amalgamations, we obviously have to do a really thorough and honest assessment of the costs and the benefits, as opposed to having a forced marriage of some of these children's aid societies, forced by the minister or the Legislature.

I think the issue of what the powers of the minister will be is an important one for discussion. I know my colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon raised a number of concerns about that. I was reading her speech. I think that those issues need to be carefully reviewed and clarified.

The authority of volunteer boards and what is the appropriate scope of their authority: again, a very important question that needs to be thoroughly discussed and examined by a standing committee—

Miss Monique Taylor: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I don't believe we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't believe we have.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm glad that there's a quorum, Mr. Speaker. I had been counting the numbers a few minutes ago, too, thinking that we needed to ensure there was a quorum in this House, not just for my speech but for an important discussion of this bill, Bill 89. Obviously, members are engaged in other activities and there are committees sitting right now, I'm sure, but I would hope that there is, obviously, full appreciation of this important issue.

Again, concerns about accountability have been brought up during the course of this debate and ensuring that there are adequate accountability mechanisms for our children's aid societies—again, very important.

The member for Dufferin–Caledon mentioned the outcomes. We need to carefully study and evaluate the outcomes of the work that's being done by our children's aid societies to ensure that we are measuring progress, that our outcomes are getting better and better all the

time, and, if not, studying how we can improve those outcomes and ensuring that there are adequate resources to discharge this very important responsibility.

I also want to recognize the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the great work she has done on the issue of human trafficking. We've talked about this in the Legislature now for a number of months. I know the government has responded to some of the recommendations that our colleague Laurie Scott has brought forward. Certainly, that's an important issue too and an important part of this issue.

Mental health services: Ensuring that there are adequate mental health services available for all children, but especially those with special needs and those in care—again, an important consideration.

I also want to commend my colleague the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for bringing forward Bill 32, the Right to Care Act. Of course, that built upon work that was done by our previous member for Barrie, Rod Jackson, who brought forward a similar private member's bill to allow for temporary care agreements for 16- and 17-year-olds. As we know, previously when a child turned 16, they were no longer eligible for the care that was provided by the children's aid societies. Now, of course, with this piece of government legislation, we're going to be including children who are aged 16 and 17. They will be eligible for care up until the age of 18. So that's a good thing too.

I have some other comments I want to add, but I will perhaps reserve them until after I've had my two-minute response. Hopefully, I can include some of them. But, again, I would reiterate: This is absolutely, vitally important to the province of Ontario, this piece of legislation. We have to get it right. We have to ensure that in the committee hearings and clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, we take the time to get this right. It's so vitally important. Quite frankly, children's lives are at stake, and we've got to make sure that we do all that we can to ensure their adequate protection.

1700

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity and to congratulate the member from Wellington–Halton Hills on his very thorough debate on this bill.

He did raise a few things that I would like to touch on. When we're talking about bringing 16- and 17-year-olds into the system, and there's the debate through stakeholders of: Is it appropriate to say that they only have to come in if they so choose—because I'm hearing the other side of it as well. Sometimes they are in danger and don't recognize their own danger. They could be involved in human trafficking. They could be involved in a dangerous situation where they would be afraid to say yes. Then I read in another part of the bill that a judge has the right to enforce that they are brought into care. So there are a lot of questions around what's happening with 16- and 17-year-olds.

The most important part that I think is happening with 16- and 17-year-olds is the funding. I've heard from

many stakeholders that there's no funding envelope being offered with this bill. There are a lot of changes that are happening here, and if the funding dollars are not there to go with them, then this is all for naught. They won't be able to bring in those 16- and 17-year-olds when they're already underfunded, they're already struggling to make ends meet to ensure they're meeting the no-deficit budget that is mandated on them.

Without giving the children's aid societies the dollars to bring it in, without ensuring what the measurement is, how we're seeing if a 16- or 17-year-old is in danger, are they part of something where they're not safe—what's going to ensure that we're bringing them into the fold, and are the dollars going to be there to cover it?

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's so hard to capture what needs to be captured in two minutes, but I'm going to try my best.

I want to talk a little bit about the ministerial powers. I know that's something that has been brought up before. This proposed legislation is going to introduce new accountability powers to hold societies accountable for compliance issues, the quality of their services and management, and their governance capabilities. It includes providing the minister with authority to appoint or replace a minority of board members, including the chair; and to appoint a supervisor to temporarily operate and manage a society where there are compliance issues and where it's in the public interest.

I also want to acknowledge the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for his thoughtful discussion on this bill. He's very correct: Nothing is more devastating than the stories of Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson, absolutely nothing. I don't think there's one person in this Legislature who was not affected by those stories. It stands to reason that we need to get this bill right, as has been said a number of times. We feel that it is a comprehensive bill.

The member for Hamilton Mountain has also brought up the situation with extending care to 16- and 17-year-olds voluntarily. We are pleased that 1,600 additional youth will be able to be served within this new system. We feel that it's important. We feel that it's important also that their voice be considered and that it be voluntary. At a certain age, like 16, we feel that youth will be able to have an impact and a say in what happens.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm always proud to get up and comment on the very knowledgeable member from Wellington–Halton Hills. He's somebody who has been here a long time in our party, and I'm certainly proud to follow him.

I had a critic role in this ministry for some short time, and it's interesting with this bill: I had a chance to meet with the child advocate for child services in Ontario. The issues that he raised, this bill does not address: areas of authority where he wasn't allowed to investigate. You've

really got to wonder why the child advocate wouldn't be allowed to identify—he gave examples where if a child would call in with an issue or a complaint, he wouldn't be allowed, in most cases, to investigate it. If it came through the school or education, through health care, he'd be blocked from finding out information about it. So children who had reached out to him were not being helped.

He recounted that he had at first been given some reassurance from the ministry that they would be addressing this issue, and of course, sadly, they didn't. One of the comments I saw last week: One of the first signs that you won't get something done with this government is from the promise that they will. So you've got to really wonder why. He's an independent officer of the Legislature—and I think we should be looking at ways of making their roles more effective. That was really his message. It's hard to believe that somebody would actually get hold of their office and he might be told that he had no authority to look into the case.

We're hoping that we'll see movement and maybe an amendment so that we can get some of these issues changed, but I know in past attempts, amendments were being voted down. So we look forward to that.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I listened with great interest to my colleague from Wellington–Halton Hills. He is absolutely right when he says it's 270 pages. It's a long bill, a very important bill.

It wouldn't be fair if I didn't stand up and say that my sister Irene Lowell, and her husband, Rick, have been foster parents for about 20 years now and have taken in a lot of kids. I can tell you that every single child they brought in, they loved from the bottom of their hearts. They supported them, took care of them, and they were able to get on with their lives—very similar to what we heard earlier in a story from one of our colleagues. This is a very important bill.

I also listened with great interest on the importance of our kids, yet we have a situation that I've raised before—and I'll raise it in my speech if I get to my 10 minutes—in Nipissing and Parry Sound where we have workers who are locked out, these same workers that everybody in this House is saying do an incredible job, care about the kids, who have to make sure they are getting the support they need. So what do we do? We lock them out. They're still out, by the way, Mr. Speaker. They bring in—and I don't know if I can say this word in the House—"scabs," replacement workers. But they bring them in at what expense? At the expense of our children that we're standing up here talking about very passionately—at the expense of our kids.

It was an NDP government—and I know the PCs don't like to talk about 20 years ago—that brought in anti-scab legislation that was overturned by my colleagues right over here, the PCs, and the Liberals have held on to it.

I'm saying to our members here, our colleagues here, we do not need replacement workers and scabs in the

province of Ontario. We need to make sure our children are taken care of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Wellington–Halton Hills has two minutes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to respond to the comments by the member for Hamilton Mountain, who expressed interest in the funding question. I would agree with her that we need to ensure there is adequate funding for children's aid societies to do their job and to do it well.

The member for Kingston and the Islands offered some clarification of the powers of the minister, and we appreciate that, although I think we need to have further discussion on that particular issue.

The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry mentioned that I've been here for a long time, and I appreciate that. My files are probably rivalling the member for St. Catharines' files by now. I've got quite a few. I look through them from time to time to help refresh my memory of some of the things that have come up.

Of course, the member for Niagara Falls mentioned the lockout at Nipissing and Parry Sound children's aid society. I met with some of the locked-out employees when they were here a week or so ago. Although I won't interfere in a collective bargaining situation, I would hope—and I think it's in the public interest, obviously—that that situation is resolved soon.

1710

Again, looking back almost 20 years ago, I brought forward a private member's resolution on children's services, calling upon the provincial government to "expand the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, so that children identified through the program who are at risk of social, emotional, physical or learning challenges, receive the necessary services to support their healthy growth and development."

It was intended to draw attention to a provincial government program that was doing good work but was under-resourced. The idea was to ensure that families had the supports they needed, so that children at risk could be identified early on, that it would be a preventive measure and we would be in a situation, hopefully, where we could prevent problems before they became large ones.

In the next provincial budget, that Progressive Conservative government, led by Mike Harris, dramatically expanded the budget for Healthy Babies, Healthy Children. I bring it up because I've heard from Halton region and other municipalities that that funding is now not keeping up with the demand for the service. I would ask the government to consider that, in the context of the debate on Bill 89.

I look forward to hearing more—

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm glad to join in the debate on Bill 89, the Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, 2016.

As I indicated before, I want to begin my remarks by again acknowledging our member from Hamilton

Mountain for her tremendous work on this file. She has been a true champion and advocate for young people when it comes to these issues.

I also want to give a particular shout-out to her private member's bill, Bill 57, the Katelynn's Principle Act. I will use those principles to lay out some of my comments with respect to this bill.

The first issue is that as a guiding principle, we need to ensure that we all understand how important it is that Katelynn's Principle is implemented, not just in the spirit of the law, not just in the letter of the law, but in the actual enforcement of that law.

We all know, and I think it's important to reiterate, that Katelynn's Principle is essentially ensuring that we have a child-centred approach. The preamble of this bill does include a very clear child-centred approach. The foundation for this approach was, as we all know, the very heinous and tragic incident surrounding Katelynn Sampson. At the end of the inquiry, the jury recognized a number of things. One of the key things they recognized was that children should have a role in the determination of their own futures; in specific, the policies and legislation, and the decisions made with respect to their welfare, should involve their voice. All of our decisions should have this framework of what is in the best interest of the child, and to have that sense and that understanding of what's in their best interest, we need to have their voice.

The change in this legislation, the amendment to increase the age of young people who are protected to include those who are 16 and 17 years old, is something that we support. A number of the provisions are all very positive additions that improve the current circumstances and provide greater benefits for young people.

But the point that was made by the member from Hamilton Mountain, which we have reiterated a number of times, needs to again be highlighted and emphasized: Any piece of legislation, whatever that piece of legislation, if it doesn't include strong enforcement; if it doesn't have provisions that ensure that there's a remedy if anything is contravened; if there isn't a way to ensure accountability with respect to the principles, to ensure that they're actually followed through, then the legislation does not have the appropriate strength that we need. In this case, that's why we're advocating for the implementation of Bill 57, so that we can ensure that there is strong enforcement of the principles, that we actually see follow-through, and that there's accountability.

Another area of concern is that the bill seeks to refine some language around First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and ensure that the language is appropriate. There is also a problem here. Using that same principle, that same value, that same idea that we need to ensure young people and children have input in decisions that impact their life, similarly, if we understand that that's an important principle for young people, we have to understand that, for the people who are being impacted, they should have a voice. With respect to our First Nations communities, with respect to indigenous people, that same principle applies.

The current structure ensures that the minister has power and ensures that there are requirements and accountability on the minister and the ministry. But there isn't the same level of respect given to First Nations people, to indigenous people, so that they have their interests reflected and that their concerns are reflected in decisions that impact the outcome of their youth.

That's a failing in this bill. We need to make sure that the people impacted have a voice. In this case, speaking about indigenous, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, they are not actually reflected the way they need to be. That's another issue.

I should have begun my comments by saying today is International Women's Day. All members of this House celebrate the importance of ensuring we recognize the struggles and the problems that continue to be faced by women, the fact that we lack equity, we lack equal access to opportunities; and that we also celebrate the tremendous achievements, the resilience and the strength of women who, in the face of those difficulties, have achieved so much. That's something that we also wanted to acknowledge today.

It's also important to celebrate, despite the difficulties we face, despite the problems we face—it's important to celebrate our victories. As a caucus, we're really proud to say that we are now over 50% represented by women, and that we are led by a woman, which is extremely powerful.

Coming back to the bill, I think it's important to point out that much of the bill is left to regulation. This is an issue that we've raised a number of times, but in particular, this piece of legislation is even more so an example of what happens when so much is left to regulation. It limits our ability, as opposition, to actually provide input.

With respect to how the changes will actually be enforced or come to fruition, we don't know how that's going to actually play out. We don't know what that looks like without seeing the regulations. The problem, as a framework, is that we have legislation that is presented in the House, and we don't know what the regulations are, so we can't actually provide in-depth analysis about whether or not this is going to be appropriate or whether it would be adequate, without knowing what those regulations are.

That criticism that applies generally is even more so in this case. Many of the components of the bill are left to regulation, more so than many other pieces of legislation, which creates a difficulty here.

My colleague from Niagara Falls mentioned this issue. I think it's also important to reiterate that if we give such importance—it's very appropriate to give importance to this bill, because it deals with those who are most vulnerable in our society; it deals with young people who are some of the most hard-off or are in some of the toughest situations that people can be found in. We also need to give attention to the realities in this province when it comes to CAS workers.

It's far too often that we are finding CAS workers who are being mistreated at work in their work conditions,

who are in positions where they are being locked out. Currently, we have a lockout, which members have talked about. It's important that, if we recognize that young people are so important and they need to be protected, those who provide the services for these young people need also to have the working conditions to be able to do their jobs.

We know that this government has a very bad track record when it comes to negotiating contracts, when it comes to dealing with public service workers. We have seen conflict in our schools with Bill 115. We've seen problems with doctors with respect to negotiations. We're seeing registered nurses who have been fired. Now, with respect to Bill 89, we are talking about the importance of young people, but at the same time, we have CAS workers who are in very difficult circumstances, and this government is to blame for that.

If you want to really follow through on not just talking about legislation, we also need to have a system that works, a system that actually represents people and respects the people who are fighting for and working for the children who are most vulnerable.

1720

I was also in the House when I had the tremendous honour of hearing our member from Windsor West's story. I think that's such a compelling story, to hear an example of someone who has gone through the system in a manner. To share her personal story, I think, takes a lot of courage, so I want to commend her for sharing that story.

I think it's also important for us to acknowledge that people have such amazing potential. Young people have such amazing potential and capacity. But often, these young people aren't able to achieve that potential because they are not given the supports they deserve and need. It's incumbent on this government, and it's incumbent on us as legislators, to ensure that we give those young people those opportunities.

This legislation is a step in the right direction. Implementing Katelynn's Principle is a step in the right direction. We have a responsibility not only to the young people and their bright futures, but to all of our futures, to ensure that people are able to express their full potential and able to achieve their full potential. To do that, we need to give them the supports they need, and I hope to see that happen in this province.

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you to the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. It's always a pleasure to listen to the comments that come forward from other members, from the other parties.

I just want to go back a little bit and respond a bit more in depth to the funding question for the 16- and 17-year-olds. It is something that is going to be coming out through regulation and will be proclaimed in September of this year. It will be ahead of the rest of the bill, and I think that's extremely important.

I also want to respond to the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton with respect to his comments on indigenous people.

As the parliamentary assistant to both ministries, children and youth services as well as indigenous relations and reconciliation, I can tell you categorically that I have been watching this section of the bill in particular. I have been listening carefully to the debate, and the language within the bill itself, and there is a very strong emphasis on respecting the culture, the heritage and the traditions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

In order to make sure that we are doing that, and to help accomplish this goal, we have designated nine indigenous well-being societies and are working to designate five more, so that First Nations, Inuit and Métis people can provide their own child and family services.

In addition, children's aid societies will be required to make every reasonable effort to pursue a plan for customary care for indigenous children and youth who are in need of protection.

In addition to that, we are also implementing the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy. That's a very important part of the bill as well.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to be able to rise in the House and to respond to this bill on child services.

We have heard a lot of good points being made here. I guess the real issue here is the time. Why are we still talking about this bill eight years after the last report, which followed a number of reports before, and talking about issues?

It's unfortunate, but it's tough to go very much time before you read another devastating case over our child services in this province.

This is not a new issue. It's an issue that's constantly recurring. It's an issue that we're not seeing this government take very expedient action on.

Even when we talk about the CPIN program, something that they're talking about, trying to promote nine years as being a real achievement—it's an embarrassment.

Talking about the child advocate being stonewalled for his help in the file—this is something we need to work on.

I was at a meeting with the First Nations team the other day, and they talked about the need to consult. I hope that we're actually going to work with them to review areas where different jurisdictions have had success. Let's go see what they've done, and let's actually take something and try to improve it.

As the human race, that's really the success story: improving on something that works. Trying to call it your own and starting from scratch is really a backwards step, because there are jurisdictions that are doing a good job, and they may not be in this country. But let's look at it and let's get it right, because our children's future depends on it.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I have to say, I've been listening intently to all the members in the debate this afternoon. Something that I have not heard touched on, however, is corrections and what's going to be happening in the changes in this legislation.

The child advocate has been calling for isolation to no longer continue for youth. What I've seen in the bill is that they've changed the name just to de-escalation. That's concerning, that they had the opportunity to really put some teeth behind what's happening in our youth corrections, and it's not reflected in the bill.

Another part of corrections is the difference between OPS and BPS. When they did the residential review act, there were recommendations that the system be brought together and that there be consistency in the system when it came to dealing with youth within our correctional facilities. That part was missed here. There is no legislation to bring those two together to ensure that our BPS employees and correctional officers are getting the same rates of pay, that they're covered under WSIB and that they have the same tools to use when working with our youth.

This is an opportunity where we could ensure that there's consistency across the system, that it goes in line with what the residential review act called for, and that it ensures that children who are in our youth correctional systems are getting the supports that they need from people who have the ability and the training to do so.

I think that's something that I would like to hear in the next government debate time.

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

Mr. Han Dong: Good afternoon. I'm very pleased to add my voice to this bill.

Again, I noticed in the debate this last week and on Monday in this Legislature, this bill was referred to as "hefty" by a number of members. Speaker, this is what a thoughtful and comprehensive piece of legislation looks like. It encompasses a lot of progressive and thoughtful pieces based on consultation. The current CFSA is a long, complex statute. It was necessary to ensure that none of the critical provisions, the safeguards, were lost in this new bill.

In addition, a new section on information-sharing was added to the bill in response to identified needs by all stakeholders. Further, the preamble articulates the government's commitment to indigenous peoples. Children's right to be heard was added to the legislation as well.

Legislative language must be extremely detailed and precise in order to provide direction and guidance to service providers and to enable courts to accurately interpret the law. I remember that this week, when I debated on this bill, I stressed the importance of being sensitive to the diverse community that we serve here in Toronto. I think this bill provides good direction, and a good legislative framework, that our service providers and all

stakeholders will be able to perform in relation to the diversity we all enjoy very much here in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton: two minutes.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you to all the members who added to the debate.

I actually want to focus in on something that the member from Hamilton Mountain raised, which was the issue of corrections. We know that there have been significant problems in the area of corrections in terms of the treatment of people who have mental health issues and particularly with the use of solitary confinement.

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This is an opportunity for us to talk about solitary confinement when it comes to young people. We know that the impact of solitary confinement is devastating. It literally leaves people changed for the rest of their lives. We know that solitary confinement is something that is extremely oppressive. There have been many human rights groups talking about ending the use of solitary confinement once and for all. I absolutely support that notion that it should be ended. It's not the appropriate way to deal with people, but particularly for young people who are still developing and growing; it is a horrible way to address young people. We need to look at alternatives in terms of ways of addressing people who have difficulties. This is an opportunity for us to ensure that young people do not ever see solitary confinement as a form of restraint, or any form of restraint, that it's a policy that is not used whatsoever.

In addition, the member from Trinity–Spadina talked about how this bill was a hefty bill, or that it responded to other concerns. The problem with this bill is that despite maybe being lengthy, it doesn't actually have a great deal of clarity in details. It leaves much to regulation. As stated before, this is a problem with bills in general, but this bill is one of the most vague, with respect to that criticism. Much of it is left to regulation.

Most importantly, as we need to reiterate once again, the member did not point out, and I'll have to point out, that much of the measurement, the metrics and the enforcement is left out of this bill. That's what we need to see: that we actually have a way of holding the government to account and holding these values and principles we hold so dearly to account.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I would just like to note that I will be sharing my time with the member from Durham.

I'm proud to rise and speak to Bill 89. We, as a government, are committed to doing everything we possibly can so that children are given the best start in life.

I must confess that this bill is very close to my heart. Since I was elected in 2014, I have always had the pleasure to speak to my constituents and to listen to their stories. While many of these stories are happy, some of them are truly heartbreaking. It is my sincere hope that the passage of this bill will lead to more happy stories, with more children being able to be protected and grow up in a happy, safe environment.

The ministry has consulted with people all across this province, from Timmins to Windsor and everywhere in between. Aside from the 400 people who attended the consultations and the 181 submissions we received, we also took the time to speak to the experts and to listen to what they had to say. We spoke to the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, to the Child and Family Services Review Board, to judges and to representatives of the Office of the Chief Justice for both the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice. The Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Children in Limbo Task Force, experts who are in the field and who are on the ground, are all in agreement that the law needs to be updated. This bill is the result of those extensive consultations.

I am proud to speak in support of this bill. This legislation that came out of the consultations with experts and the public puts children and youth at the centre of our services so that they have opportunities to succeed and reach their full potential.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the good that will come from this bill here, put forth in the House. It will increase the age of protection to include all 16- and 17-year-olds. It affirms the rights of children and acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It builds on the goals of Katelynn's Principle by clearly stating that every child needs to be heard and respected. These are all things that we, as a government and as Ontarians, should support.

This is an act that, if passed, would strengthen the child welfare and child and family services system by strengthening the ministry's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the services they provide, as well as the ministry's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the management of public funds.

The one piece that I wish to speak to in this truly comprehensive legislation is that, if passed, Bill 89 will increase the age of protection to include all 16- and 17-year-olds. If passed, we anticipate that up to 1,600 youth will benefit from raising the age of protection by the end of the first year of implementation. That's 1,600 kids who will have demonstrably better lives as a result of actions taken by this House.

In our bill, 16- and 17-year-olds will have access to child protection services, including services through a voluntary agreement with the children's aid society. In addition to providing outcomes for kids as they transition into adulthood, these provisions would bring Ontario in line with other provinces and territories as the eighth province to raise the age of protection. That's 1,600 kids who can grow up, go to college or university, find good jobs, start families and lead happy lives, just because of one piece of this comprehensive legislation.

While some on the other side of the House have said that this bill is toothless, I ask them to think about 1,600 kids a year who will have better lives as a result of it. I am proud to stand in support of this bill. We are proud to uphold Katelynn's Principle in this bill. I am proud that the bill affirms the rights of children and acknowledges

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am proud that we are strengthening the ministry's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the services they provide, as well as the ministry's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the management of public funds.

But mostly, Speaker, I am proud to know that this bill will be helping kids who are 16 and 17 years of age to have access to child protection services. The passage of this bill will ensure that these kids won't fall through the cracks. It will ensure that they have supports and tools while they transition to adulthood. It will ensure that these kids can grow up and lead happy lives. I am proud to stand in support of this legislation and want to encourage all sides to ensure its passage.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thanks to the member from Davenport for her excellent presentation. Unfortunately I was in committee, so I missed a lot of the debate.

This bill, as you know, is a very comprehensive bill, Speaker, and it touches on many aspects. I'm just going to briefly talk about how this bill affects children's aid societies throughout the province. This an important initiative that will assist children's aid societies in delivering more culturally appropriate services and appropriate protection for children throughout this great province. This bill puts a strong emphasis on respecting the culture, heritage and traditions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

I had the pleasure of travelling this province roughly two years ago, developing a strategy for FASD. During those travels, I heard about how this piece of legislation needed to be upgraded and amended to be more appropriate so that we could more ably protect our children in the province of Ontario. This bill seeks to do that. With the help of all members in this House, we know we'll put the interests of our children first and foremost. We are going to work hard to make this bill as effective and as perfect as possible, if there is any such thing as perfection. On this side of the House, I know we are willing to work on behalf of our children to make this bill effective for all.

We will work hard to keep children and youth with their families, in their communities, whenever possible. We'll support them with culturally appropriate services.

These are changes that will also be transformational for the operation of children's aid societies throughout this province. The proposed legislation would strengthen the ministry's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the services they provide and for the appropriate management of public funds.

We are committed to ensuring that Ontario's children's aid societies remain, first and foremost, accountable to the public. In addition, with this legislation, our government intends to strengthen the ministry's oversight of licensed settings in order to protect the health, safety and well-being of children and youth in residential care in Ontario.

It will also enhance the quality of care provided in licensed residential settings. Bill 89 will give the Ministry of Children and Youth Services the authority to appoint inspectors who can conduct announced and unannounced licensing inspections. This will ensure that services being provided meet appropriate standards.

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Our government is also committed to helping more children find stability through permanent homes and relationships that are meaningful to them. That is why this legislation will give children who are being adopted a stronger voice in decisions being made about their relationships with birth families and others who are important to them post-adoption.

Speaker, this legislation will also provide children, youth and families with the right to access information in the files about them. I have heard from families in my great riding of Durham and throughout this province how frustrating it can be when it's not consistently administered, repeating their story when trying to access services they need. We have to make sure they are able to access those services. This bill is about that. It's about protection and the accessing of services for families and, most importantly, our young people.

I am pleased that the new rules around information sharing between service providers will make it so that families only have to tell their story once. This will create a more holistic system that improves both the experiences and outcomes for children and their families. I've also outlined this modern child- and youth-centred legislative framework, which will bring so many positive changes for all Ontarians.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 89. A number of speakers have commented this afternoon, and I've had the opportunity to be able to listen and take part. The act has obviously needed a review—32 years in time since it was first reviewed. A lot of the changes come out of the coroners' cases that a number of people have spoken to, and certainly those would cause concern in the community, the children's aid community and for people who have children in care.

One thing that we certainly applaud in this act is recognizing—the 16- and 17-year-olds who have moved into being recognized now as still in care. A number of the Auditor General's reports—I think it was 2003, 2008 and 2016—recognized the number of improvements and changes they felt needed to be included in this act, so I applaud the government for that.

We're looking forward to getting to committee. There are a number of recommendations—I've heard a number here over the last couple of days—that people feel should be included in this. I think that when we're looking at these children who are in care, it's a big responsibility, and we want to ensure that the foster parents, the people who are providing this care and the staff who are working with them, as well, have all the tools that they can work with.

It would be nice if we had no inquests for children who had fallen through the cracks; hopefully that could be prevented. Hopefully with this act, when it is upgraded, and with the new bill, those types of things will cease to be a fact.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to once again respond to debate, this time to the member from Davenport and the member from Durham. I think it's unfortunate that they're splitting their 10 minutes in half and taking five minutes each. There's so much to talk about on this bill. There are so many things that we need to be able to get to the bottom of, and taking that time and really digging into what's happening in this bill is so vitally important.

One of the things that the member talked about was 1,600 youth being brought in by the end of the first year. Somebody on this side of the House had mentioned that some of the legislation was toothless. I definitely have concerns. Are there dollars going with those extra 1,600 youth who could possibly be brought in by the end of the first year? Our children's aid societies are already mandated to run at a zero deficit. They have to balance their budgets. They're barely making it by. They have CPIN being enacted and brought in. The rollout on that is costing way more than the \$220,000 that's being allotted to each children's aid society. That's putting them over the budget. Now we're going to add 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds without funding to add to this legislation. We're literally playing a shell game, and we're going to have children's aid societies cutting services that families need.

Now, we've seen this happening in the last couple of years, when budgets were cut for some and increased for others, but the bottom line is they're all running on shoestring funding. So I hope that, with these extra 1,600 kids who are going to be living this wonderful life after they've had the ability to be part of the system, the dollars are going to be there to ensure they do get the services they need.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 89, the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, and respond to the members from Durham and Davenport.

One of the key things—and the member opposite mentioned this—is protection to include 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds. I think we've been talking about that for a while. That's what children's aid societies came and told us. When they talked about CPIN, they said, "Can you put more money in the ministry—not give us money, but put more money in the ministry—to make this work better?" I heard from my children's aid society about two weeks ago.

I want to mention some of the comments made earlier today about justice on two fronts. The Hay centre is in my riding of Ottawa South. I know the work that goes on there, through the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa, and

some of the things that we've done in the community to expand opportunities for young people in custody to get a trade or a skill. It's a great community partnership that we have there, and that's not something just the government did, but that contractors and tradespeople came together to provide those supports to those young people.

When I was two, I lived in the Ottawa juvenile detention centre, not because I was in custody, but because my dad was a probation and parole officer, and so he was with the Family Court. It is really critical. The things that the member opposite is talking about are critical to get right—when you talk about things like restraints. Restraints are something that you use as a last resort if there's imminent physical harm. I have to tell you that: That's how they have to be used. That's what we have to do as a government, and those are the challenges that are out there. You have to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I guess I hear the member next to us talk about—there's much to be said on this bill, and I'm quite surprised with the splitting of the 10 minutes. But we look at, I guess, a government that doesn't want to really talk about this bill because of their record over the last number of years. We shouldn't be finding out information from so many of these coroners' inquests. Problems that are there have been there for years, and we've seen no action. CPIN is an example: identified in 2012, and they stood up and bragged about getting this in place by 2020. Huge issues—the coroner talked about this being a key part of this action plan to solve some of the issues.

I heard comment across about raising taxes. Well, on the one hand, you talk about the importance of solving this problem for the future of our children; on the other hand, we hear about why things are drawn out, why there's no action. Why are things like a simple IT program taking eight years, nine years?

We have issues that have been dealt—we have our own officers of the Legislature here talking about how their concerns are being ignored, how they're being blocked from looking at some of the issues, doing some of the investigations. I'm sure this government is getting tired of investigations, especially OPP-type, but this is our own officer of the Legislature whose role really is to work with the government to improve the system. We really want to make sure that we get this right. It has taken a long time—30-some years. I think it's time to get it right.

1750

We don't really see the action, so we're interested in going to committee and seeing just how interested they are in some of the amendments.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I want to thank the members who have stood up to speak about this this afternoon: the

members from Sarnia–Lambton, Hamilton Mountain, Ottawa South and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

I think it's worth re-establishing and restating that we as a government are committed to doing everything we possibly can so that children are given the best start in life. I think that's what we want for our own children; that's what we want for all children. At least, I know that as a mother, that's what I want for my kids, and I know that every mother wants that—and every father. Every grandfather and grandmother wants that for their grandchildren—or their nieces and nephews.

That's why we are proposing the changes that we are proposing here, through the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2016, which will provide a modern child- and youth-centred legislative framework.

As I have already said, and has already been mentioned from this side of the House, the proposed legislation puts children and youth at the centre of our services so that they have opportunities to succeed and reach their full potential.

The proposed legislation, as I said earlier, increases the age of protection to include all 16- and 17-year-olds. I know that there was a question from the member for Hamilton Mountain as to the funding: Is there additional funding for the protections for these 16- and 17-year-olds that will be added on to the system? I believe my colleague from Kingston and the Islands did make reference to this when she got up to speak, saying that all of that will be established in regulation this September. So there is more to come.

What we are proposing as part of our changes, as I said earlier, affirms the rights of children and acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It continues to build, and it builds on the goals of Katelynn's Principle. It recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion and of the need to continue to address systemic racism.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that we see all sides of the House agreeing on this bill.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: I look forward to taking us to closing time here this afternoon on Bill 89.

I'd like to talk about an issue that is absolutely crucial to the development of any area in the world, whether it's a country or a province, the smallest town or the largest city, or the most diverse community, and it's child welfare.

We have an old system. It's worn out; it's underdeveloped; it's flawed. It hasn't changed with the times in the way that we've needed it to. It especially hasn't changed with the times the way our children have needed it to.

Children need help. That's what being a child is all about. You need to have others watching out for you until you can do it for yourself. So it's on us, on those who have the power to take care of them and, more importantly, the duty to take care of them, to give them what they need most: rights and freedoms, security and protection, and safe and loving homes and families, all of whose

members respect them and care for them as much as I do for my girls.

“Parent” is more than a noun, Speaker; it’s a verb too. We support giving children rights and a voice in their future, not because it’s some issue about which one might have an opinion but because it’s a necessity, and necessities cannot be argued about.

The Child and Family Services Act is 32 years old. That’s just over a generation old. In other words, we’re a generation behind on this thing.

True, it might have worked out well for one generation. Many things worked out well for many generations. But the generations are different—they’re always different—and it’s time to update this act.

Countless organizations have recognized and communicated the issues in our child welfare system. This is no recent thing. In three different reports since 2003, the Auditor General has laid out the problems with the ministry’s accountability on this issue: one in 2003, another in 2008 and one in 2016. For far too long, there have been far too serious deficiencies in this system and far too much lacking, as the Auditor General’s report shows, in regard to its improvement.

We’ve let our most vulnerable slip through the cracks at times, and sometimes in the most touching and unfortunate of instances, as in the cases of Miss Katelynn Sampson and young Mr. Jeffrey Baldwin, whom we’ve heard a lot about during debate on this bill. We’ve let them do more than slip through the cracks; they’ve died as a result of those cracks, and that’s not something that should ever happen.

Take Katelynn; she was seven. What are most kids doing when they’re seven years old? Like most of us, we were probably riding a bike or out for a swim. What did we have on our plates when we were seven years old? Certainly not what Katelynn had on her plate. She will not be forgotten. That’s why we’re talking about this bill here today.

In April 2016, the jury of the inquest into her death released 173 recommendations to reform Ontario’s child protection system. This was because of her: Katelynn’s Principle, as it’s called.

We’ve had many other stories that we’ve been talking about as well throughout the afternoon.

This bill takes some of those recommendations. In Katelynn’s Principle are some of the most important and primary changes we must make to the Child and Family Services Act. Nothing so terrible as what happened to her should ever happen again, and we want to assure that that is the case, with these adopted recommendations.

I was telling the story earlier about the tragic situations that occurred in Prince Edward county within the last decade, where foster children were abused in a couple of different homes. These were children who didn’t die as a result of those cracks, but they certainly were impacted and are still impacted today. They were sexually abused by their foster parents because of a lack of oversight in those foster homes. Those perpetrators were found guilty; some of them were sentenced to time in a penitentiary.

Those people, those individuals, are now back out in our community—and it’s a whole other matter when it comes to the sentencing of those who take advantage of our most vulnerable. They did plead guilty to charges like possession of child pornography, and sexual assault and invitation to sexual touching, and other heinous crimes.

In one case in Prince Edward county in the last 10 years, the folks who served the time in a penitentiary were running a sexual cult in their homes. They had 25 different foster children over a nine-year period, and many of them were abused, and many of them are still feeling the effects of that abuse today. They have mental health issues, substance abuse issues, an inability to trust, and they will have those issues for the rest of their lives. Those who perpetrated those heinous crimes are now free and living in our communities.

I know that the Prince Edward County Children’s Aid Society no longer exists. It has been amalgamated with the Highland Shores Children’s Aid. The leadership there, under the direction of the new board and certainly the executive director, Mark Kartusch, are doing an excellent job of making sure this doesn’t happen again in our region. The Highland Shores Children’s Aid is responsible for Hastings, Prince Edward and Northumberland counties, and the children who are wards in those communities.

Looking back at the Auditor General’s report, we also see that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services “does not measure individual agency performance against targets, and does not effectively monitor client outcomes or overall program performance against measurable and meaningful targets.”

I’ve said that the welfare of our children is not a choice; it’s a necessity. Having no monitoring of client outcomes and no measurable and meaningful targets for overall program performance doesn’t sound good—it doesn’t sound good at all. But it does sound like something. It makes it sound like this whole issue is a choice and not a necessity.

I cannot say it enough: Child welfare is not a choice. It’s our responsibility as legislators to make sure that we get this legislation right.

I look forward to speaking on this at a future time, on a future day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 6 o’clock, pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex has given notice of dissatis-

faction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for five minutes.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

1800

Mr. Rick Nicholls: On May 3, 2016, the Ministry of Community Safety issued a news release announcing the installation of scanners. This release provided the original timeline for scanner installation. This was something that PC leader Patrick Brown and I had called for, along with OPSEU, of course, so we were very supportive of this action. It was the right thing to do.

However, there have been issues with the delivery of this promise. The news release issued at the time stated, “The first 11 scanners are scheduled to be installed by the end of March 2017.” In an attached backgrounder, Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre’s main facility was listed as one of the first 11 installations. The Elgin-Middlesex Regional Intermittent Centre was scheduled to receive its scanner the following year.

At some point, a bit of revisionist history came into play and the government backed away from its original promise to have a scanner installed at EMDC’s main facility by the end of this very month. Now, the new minister’s office is saying that the scanner is prioritized for installation in the fall of 2017.

I just can’t understand how something can be prioritized for installation later than the original promise to have it installed. When did the government remove EMDC’s main facility from the high-priority list of facilities to receive scanners by March 2017? In light of an overdose death last November, I think it’s entirely reasonable to ask.

I now move on to “The \$1-Billion Hellhole,” Toronto South Detention Centre. That’s not my quote, but Toronto Life’s quote, the magazine. I encourage every member of the Legislature to read Toronto Life’s article on this jail. It’s heartbreaking, and we must learn from it.

Sheldon Small is a correctional officer at the jail who I have had the opportunity to get to know over the past couple of years. He showed true courage by speaking out for better conditions for his brothers and sisters in corrections, as well as calling for better treatment of inmates. He saw what happened when I first raised serious safety concerns, when all staff were issued a memo to stay quiet or risk losing their jobs. He knew the risks and did the right thing. These people, Speaker, are true heroes.

He commented on the government’s naive plan for this jail, as well as the violent, dangerous conditions in Toronto South and its impact on morale. He was quoted as saying, “This was supposed to be a cheaper jail, with less cost and less staff to run it. The inmates were supposed to be more compliant. But they forgot to tell the inmates that.” He added, “If you’re an officer and there’s a guy on your unit who has assaulted 12 of your friends, would you feel like coming in tomorrow?” Imagine if you were assaulted and no records were, in fact, kept.

Toronto South’s problems are hard to fathom in a brand new facility. Mould problems started within the first year. Unbreakable windows were broken and over a thousand panes of glass were replaced. Software systems broke down, leaving alarms non-functional. The decision to understaff the facility by trying out a supervision model never before seen in Ontario was reckless and a typical example of Liberals knowing better than the experts. Staff were concerned that the direct supervision model would put inmates and staff alike at increased risk, and they have been proven right.

Auditor General Jim McCarter warned in 2008 that the government had not undertaken the necessary formal studies to determine whether this experimental supervision model was suitable for Toronto’s inmate population and corrections system. Specifically, he warned that the use of a direct supervision model “may significantly affect its operating costs and the health and safety of its staff and inmates.”

In an attempt to save money, the Liberal government may cost the province nearly and dearly. A billion-dollar class action lawsuit is being prepared against the Ontario government on behalf of all inmates who have experienced staffing-related lockdowns.

In conclusion, the government ignored front-line staff who warned them about the dangers of trying this experimental model. The Liberals even ignored the Auditor General’s warning. They even ignored my question asking why they dismissed so many warnings. Sadly, we cannot ignore the blood that is spilled due to these hellish conditions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough Southwest and parliamentary—oh, sorry, it’s someone else. The member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise to respond to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Our government is on track with the installation of full-body scanners in all the 26 adult provincial correctional facilities by 2018. This is all part of the corrections reform to further improve staff and inmate safety, reduce contraband and enhance security.

As mentioned this morning, Mr. Speaker, we can confirm that 11 body scanners are currently installed in Ontario jails. I know that our correctional staff are very pleased with the success of the body scanners in detecting contraband and preventing these items from entering our institutions.

I would like to note that the installation of body scanners at a number of correctional facilities, including the EMDC, requires some renovation work to accommodate the new equipment and its use. When a body scanner is brought into the institution, it cannot simply be installed in the nearest facility or just anywhere in the facility. The scanner must be placed in a manner that upholds the security for staff while maintaining the continuity of operations within the facility.

We know the importance of installing a body scanner at the EMDC, which is why we have ensured that it will

be installed by the fall of 2017. The minister is committed to the safety and security of both the staff and the inmates. The EMDC now has approximately 350 new security cameras and six additional metal detectors, in addition to the upcoming full body scanner.

We have also invested \$33 million annually to address immediate priorities in our system as a whole, including \$14.8 million for capital improvements. These initiatives will better allow correctional officers to identify inmates attempting to bring contraband into our correctional facilities. Enhancing security in our facilities across the province is a key part of the government's transformation of Ontario's correctional system to build safer communities.

I know the member opposite also brought up additional concerns with another one of our facilities this morning. The Toronto South Detention Centre was specifically designed to include the newest practices in the field of correctional services. This is important as we evolve our understanding of corrections as a whole. There are 54 dedicated rooms for programs to help inmates deal with drug and alcohol problems or anger management issues. There are also six classrooms for inmate learning, as well as indoor and outdoor smudging areas for indigenous inmates and two multi-faith worship rooms. Rehabilitation is an essential part of our correctional system, and these initiatives aid in achieving this.

Minister Lalonde visited TSDC just last month and saw a number of positives and great potential for the design and layout of the facility. She also notes that there is still a lot of work to be done, including at the other correctional facilities.

One of the biggest issues the minister noted are the staffing levels. We know our facilities need more correctional officers, nurses, maintenance staff and cleaning staff. Increased staffing levels would help better maintain the safety, security and well-being of our inmates, as well as alleviate the pressures our existing staff are feeling. This is why we've committed to hiring an additional 2,000 correctional officers since 2013. We have since deployed 1,482 new correctional officers to our correctional facilities. An additional 137 are expected to graduate this month alone. Our government has also created an additional 58 mental health nurse positions to provide specialized services to inmates. At the same time, we are ensuring that all new correctional officers now receive core training to help them better care for inmates with mental illnesses.

These are just some of the ways we are continually reforming our correctional systems. Ultimately, the safety, security and well-being of our staff and inmates are the greatest consideration in any decision our government makes or has made to our correctional system.

GENETIC DISCRIMINATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer by the Attorney General

to the question given today. The member has up to five minutes to debate this matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

1810

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker, for staying a bit late with us tonight. I asked for this late show debate due to my complete dissatisfaction with the response I received on an important question this morning that I asked of the Acting Premier, regarding her response to the federal government following the call to the Council of the Federation for input from all provinces.

I was seeking clarity, of course, on the Premier's response to this request. I know that Attorney General answered the question, but I will remind folks what the question actually was. I asked her to give her assurance to the federal government that Ontario was in favour of ending genetic discrimination through Bill S-201.

Instead of answering my simple question about the Premier's stance, the Attorney General attempted to silo the issue into constitutionality at the federal level. Given the federal request that the provinces weigh in, this is a distinctively provincial issue as well.

With that, I would like to go over the background on Bill S-201, which is being voted on tonight—actually, likely as we speak—and which would prohibit the requirement of genetic testing or disclosure in contracting of any kind between individuals, thus preventing discrimination.

Three constitutional experts who came before the federal justice committee agreed that this legislation was within the authority of the federal government to pass and did not infringe on provincial jurisdiction. Federal Justice Minister Wilson-Raybould was apparently not satisfied with this and sent a letter to the Council of the Federation, requesting that it respond, communicating its stance on Bill S-201, given some concerns on constitutionality.

The Council of the Federation is comprised of all Canadian Premiers, and a request to it is a request to the Premiers. I wanted transparency on what our Premier's response to that can request was.

Genetic discrimination is very obviously an issue that is important to Ontarians and the Premier's own caucus, considering the provincial bill addressing genetic discrimination came from the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. That member called it “appalling” that the federal government would hide behind this jurisdictional non-concern to avoid ending discriminatory practices in the provinces.

I want to know, did the Premier communicate to the Council of the Federation, or to her federal counterparts, that the province of Ontario is in favour of prohibiting genetic discrimination and that it supports Bill S-201? The member for Eglinton–Lawrence has asked the Premier and the Attorney General to show support for this bill, and I want to know what response, if any, the Premier and the Attorney General gave.

If the Liberal government is in favour of ending genetic discrimination against Ontarians and all Canad-

ians, the government should take an open stance. The federal government has specifically requested that the provinces provide a position on the constitutionality of this bill. Quebec, Manitoba and BC have all sent an answer to the federal justice minister. Of course, Ontario has not, and that was why I was asking a question, which I believe the minister simply wasn't prepared for, or had very little, if any, knowledge about.

It was a significant news story over the weekend that the member for Eglinton–Lawrence had commented on. We, of course, debated this bill previously in the Legislature. Through prorogation, after second reading, it was wiped off the order paper, but I believe that the member had re-tabled the bill, and I believe all members of this Legislature, all three political parties, supported that bill. Again, either the government supports the bill federally or it does not, and they should be willing to state that openly on the record. That's what I was asking.

This is not an issue that can or should be shrugged off to the Council of the Federation. The Premiers are, in fact, the council. If our neighbour provinces can take the time to provide a stance for or against, why has the Premier or her government—including the Attorney General, of whom I asked the question this morning—not? Why has she not done so, when the subject of genetic discrimination is worthy of debate here in Ontario?

The vote in the House of Commons is set for this evening. There is likely still time for the Premier and her officials to reach out to her federal counterparts and convey Ontario's position on this issue. All she really needs to do is just pick up the phone.

I had hoped that my question today might shed light on where the government stands on this important issue, but the unwillingness of the Premier, through the Attorney General, to openly declare a position on Bill S-201 in response to the federal government continues to leave us in the dark, just hours before the final decision is made. So, Speaker, I hope for some clarity tonight, knowing that I've given them some time about the issue, and hopefully they can clarify.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough Southwest and parliamentary assistant has five minutes.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Our government's role in the human rights system is very important to our govern-

ment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for his private member's bill on genetic discrimination. He's a fantastic MPP and is a great advocate for his constituents.

Speaker, everyone has the right to live free from discrimination, inequality and intolerance, including genetic discrimination. The protection of human rights is a fundamental principle in Ontario and is something our government believes in very strongly.

Our government was proud to support the member from Eglinton–Lawrence's bill. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport spoke passionately about this bill when it was being debated in this Legislature. As the member opposite knows, Bill 30 has been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for further examination.

In Ontario, we've taken important steps to strengthen human rights in Ontario. In 2012, with all-party consent, the Legislature amended the Human Rights Code to prevent discrimination against transgender people by adding the terms "gender identity" and "gender expression." Our government is always willing to look into strengthening human rights in Ontario and preventing all forms of discrimination.

As the Attorney General said during question period today, we are aware of federal Bill S-201, An Act to prohibit and prevent genetic discrimination. I would like to remind the member opposite that this is a federal piece of legislation, within the jurisdiction of the House of Commons and the Senate.

I understand that today the Prime Minister was clear that there are elements of the Senate bill that are unconstitutional. This position was reiterated by the federal Minister of Justice during a press conference today. I understand that there was a free vote on this bill this evening in the House of Commons.

Our government's position is clear on genetic discrimination.

Instead of involving himself in federal matters, I suggest that the member opposite focus on building Ontario up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1817.

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