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(Hansard)**

**Journal
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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 4 June 2008

Mercredi 4 juin 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 4 June 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 4 juin 2008

The House met at 0900.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Mr. Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to begin debate on new legislation that, if passed, would maintain Ontario's economic prosperity while improving access and opportunity for all Ontarians. Our proposed legislation, the Photo Card Act, is of importance to many Ontarians.

I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant for transportation, Mike Brown, the member for Algoma, who will resume debate on this legislation when I have completed my remarks.

I'm sure many of our members are aware that the western hemisphere travel initiative is almost completely phased in. Air travellers have been subject to the new rules since January 2007, and at our land and sea border crossings travellers from Ontario are already being asked to prove citizenship and produce identification documents when crossing the border.

On June 1, 2009, the US government will require all visitors to prove their citizenship using a passport or an accepted passport alternative. With just over half of all Canadians holding a passport, we want to make it as simple as possible for Ontario travellers to have access to a secure border crossing document. An enhanced driver's licence could be used as a passport alternative at all Canada-US land and sea border crossings. This will mean less traffic congestion at the border and fewer delays for travellers and commercial drivers.

Our borders are the economic gateways to this province and, as government, we must be responsible for

keeping them safe, open and accessible. Every day more than 92,000 cars, and over 22,000 trucks carrying \$650 million in goods, cross our borders. That amounts to more than \$330 billion in trade every year with the United States, Ontario's largest trading partner. In fact, nearly 60% of all of Canada's trade with the United States passes through these borders.

If this legislation is passed, our enhanced driver's licence would offer the same privileges as the existing driver's licence and would include additional information needed to show proof of Canadian citizenship. We are taking the right steps to make border travel more accessible and help reduce congestion, potentially saving our economy millions of dollars.

We also propose to provide a photo identification card for Ontarians who do not or cannot drive. Like the enhanced driver's licence, our photo card could be enhanced for use as a convenient passport alternative.

Of course, Ontarians who choose to add citizenship information to their driver's licence or photo card would expect this information to be protected from those who should not have this information. That is why we have already recommended a number of key security measures to Ontario's driver's licences. Anyone who has renewed their licence during the past few months will have noticed these new, leading-edge security features, such as a laser-engraved photo and signature, a fine-line security background and a 2D bar code. Making sure all these cards are issued legitimately is also critical to combatting fraud and identity theft. We propose to ensure the integrity of our licence and photo card issuing systems through photo comparison technology. This state-of-the-art technology would help us make sure multiple cards are not issued to the same individual under different identities.

The reality is that Ontario's driver's licence card is among the most commonly used documents for identification purposes. Proof of identification is frequently requested for everyday transactions such as opening a bank account or proving age for a senior discount. The photo card we are proposing today has been long advocated by groups representing people with disabilities and seniors. If passed, this legislation would improve access to many everyday services and conveniences. Like drivers, photo card holders would have the option of adding citizenship information to their cards. This enhanced photo card could then be used in much the same manner as the enhanced driver's licence, serving as a convenient travel document for entering the United States.

Our government has worked closely with the Canada Border Services Agency and the US Department of Homeland Security to make the enhanced driver's licence and enhanced photo card programs a reality. And we have worked with Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner every step of the way. Most recently, the commissioner has spoken to the federal government and identified the need for federal officials to support the province in providing citizenship information on its cards. We support the commissioner and are committed to ensuring the protection and privacy of personal information, and we will continue to work with her throughout the development and implementation process.

Stakeholders such as the Canadian Council of the Blind, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the United Senior Citizens of Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police, for example, have contributed valuable input. Each of these organizations—and there are many—is to be commended for getting us to where we are today. We will continue to work with all of our stakeholders and counterparts to implement this legislation. Removing barriers to access enhances opportunity for everyone. So I again ask my colleagues today to support this legislation.

0910

There is some history to this legislation, as members of the Legislature may be aware. I see my colleague from the Renfrew area here today. I was in the presence yesterday of his brother Mark Yakabuski, who is the president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. What a distinguished individual and what a pleasant individual to deal with. I told him about his brother in the Legislature, and he was happy to accept the compliments and comparisons that were taking place at the time. But I know that all members of the Legislature are interested in this alternative.

The history of this is that after the attacks on New York City and Washington in September 2001, there was considerable and understandable concern about the fact that security would have to be increased significantly. What is actually sad about those attacks, among many things—the loss of life of course being the first and foremost, the loss of very expensive buildings and the damage that was done physically as well as the lives that were lost and the people injured—all of those are extremely significant and traumatic. But in addition to that, subsequently what we have is a situation where there has been an obsession—and an understandable obsession—with security, particularly in the United States, where the attacks took place and the effect is most profound. As a result, the Congress of the United States passed a rather interesting act called the western hemisphere travel initiative. It was going to require, among other things, documentation that would be a passport or another secure document for anyone coming into the United States from another country or for American citizens returning to the United States.

By the way, I am encouraged, I might note at this time, that the state of New York is at the present time working on a situation similar to ours; that is, a more

secure driver's licence for the purpose of entry back into the United States. And we in Canada have expressed a view that we would be prepared to accept that.

There was a very significant outcry for security measures. But when people who reside along the border, or within 100 or 200 miles of the border, understood the ramifications of demanding a passport and only a passport or another very secure document that was difficult to obtain and perhaps expensive—when this was determined to be a great imposition on people crossing the border, we had friends on both sides of the border who were talking about finding an alternative. So this never was a fight between Canadians and Americans; or, in the United States, between Democrats and Republicans; or, in Canada, between our political parties—it was always a difference of opinion largely between those who reside along the border or within 100 or 200 miles of the border and those who were further into the interior, who did not perhaps appreciate the negative impact that such a provision would have. As a result, there were many of us who decided we would seek an alternative.

At the time, fewer than 25% of Americans happened to have a passport; 35% to 40% of Canadians probably had a passport. That meant that the majority of individuals did not have a passport. And it was unlikely that particularly those of us who reside near borders or have visitors from the United States coming to our areas—the member for Timmins–James Bay is here at the present time. He would have hunters and fishers who come up to his area from the United States, and other visitors who want to enjoy everything there is to enjoy in his riding. He would know that it's likely that those who travel every year and business travellers would be in possession of a passport. But for those who are more impulse visitors or decided one year to do so, the fact that they would have to go through the process of getting a passport may have deterred them from visiting our province and our country. That is why we looked for an alternative.

I want to give great credit to our friends on the other side of the border who are allies of ours on this particular issue. As a result, in British Columbia they have a pilot project with an enhanced security driver's licence issued to some people on a voluntary basis, and correspondingly, in the state of Washington a similar circumstance exists where in a pilot project a more secure—enhanced, as we call it—driver's licence is accepted for crossing the border.

Premier McGuinty has met on many occasions with officials of the United States, including the Great Lakes governors, who are quite sympathetic to the position that all of us are taking on this issue. I think the Premier met with other governors as well in different venues in the United States and, in some cases, in Canada and discussed this particular issue. As well, I have had opportunities on many occasions to meet, in Washington and other venues, with officials from the United States government and with those who are sympathetic in the United States to the position that Ontario was taking.

Initially, I think there was an inclination to accept things. I remember there was a meeting of Prime Minister Harper, the President of Mexico and the President of the United States in Cancun, Mexico. When they emerged from that meeting, Prime Minister Harper said, "Folks, you'd better get used to it. This is going to be the law." I think perhaps on that occasion the import of that was not impressed upon the three leaders. Even the President of the United States had said at one point in time that when he signed very detailed legislation, he may not have been aware of all of the potential implications of that legislation. Remember, it's a very comprehensive bill. And he was a governor in Texas, so he was a state governor who knew the importance of travel across borders.

Prime Minister Harper, I'm pleased, changed his position and the federal government changed its position when many of us along the border—I'm sure including members of the government caucus in Ottawa—recognized that we'd better find an alternative, we'd better look for an alternative, because the provision of a passport only would be very onerous. So meetings continued, particularly the provinces that were interested.

A year ago in April I went to Washington. Our officials, by the way, were very helpful and very accommodating at the Canadian embassy in Washington. On that occasion, I got an opportunity to meet with officials of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State in the United States and indicated that we in Ontario had developed the beginning of a more secure driver's licence—secure in terms of the security provisions within it. We enhanced security considerably, and from this basis we could add additional information which would be attractive, I thought, to them to use for going across the border. I was very pleased that they were open to the idea and informed me at the time that the state of Vermont was looking at that. We now know that Manitoba and Quebec are looking at this opportunity as well. What our hope is and what I see happening is that states on the other side correspondingly will develop a system where an enhanced driver's licence is used for the purpose of crossing the border and then crossing back into the United States. Because if we were to require passports, that would be difficult. It would have very significant ramifications for tourism and trade between our friends in the United States and ourselves. So meetings continued.

Representative Louise Slaughter in New York state led the charge in the United States Congress in terms of trying to, first of all, postpone the date of implementation—that was done successfully—and then to look at other aspects which would make it less onerous. I commend her for her work. And there were many others—to be fair, there were many others. I remember one day phoning the offices of two people in the United States Congress, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska and Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. Those are two individuals who probably don't agree on a lot of things in the United States Congress. But here they were, they had co-

sponsored a bill to delay the implementation. What would bring Senator Leahy and Senator Stevens—one a liberal Democrat, the other a conservative Republican—together on a piece of legislation? Well, geography did, because they both represented states which were adjacent to Canada, and they recognized the importance of movement of people between those two countries.

0920

I was very encouraged when I saw that we had allies in the United States. I remember meeting with Governor Taft of Ohio; he was governor of Ohio when he was here in Toronto. We happened to be at the same tourism event. We had a lengthy discussion about the matter, and even though Ohio does not border directly on Ontario, he recognized the importance of the citizens of Ohio being able to visit here and then come back, and Canadians being able to visit Ohio and come back. There's been a long history of visitation between Americans and Canadians. Whether it's hockey teams travelling back and forth, marching bands that have appeared in parades on both sides of the border, friends visiting friends, business people visiting business people, sports fans attending events, there are a lot—

Interjection: The Cleveland Browns.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I hear mention of the Cleveland Browns. Many years ago, people used to travel to see the Cleveland Browns from a long distance; now, probably more the Buffalo Bills or Detroit Lions, because they're right on the border. But the Cleveland Browns would still have a large delegation of fans here. Correspondingly, Americans love to come up to Canada to enjoy what we have to offer.

We had to find an alternative. It wasn't easy. You will recall that early on there were US officials who said that nothing but the passport would be accepted. The ambassador of the United States said that, and he was being honest and up front, because that was the position of the administration at the time. I think as time evolved and people explained what could be used as an alternative, homeland security became more interested and more accepting, as long as all of the security provisions could be found within that document.

What is the advantage of the document? First of all, before I talk about the advantages of a licence rather than a passport, I'll go back. People can still get a passport; I must say that. If they want to get a passport, they can get a passport. If they want to get a Nexus card, they can get a Nexus card for crossing the border, or other special cards that require a lot of security checks. They can get that.

But I can say that the advantage of the licence is that it's a document that most people have in their wallet—younger people may not. I wrote to the Department of Homeland Security on behalf of the province of Ontario. I was given the responsibility by the government of Ontario as Minister of Tourism at the time to submit a document to the Department of Homeland Security indicating some of the changes we wanted to see.

One of the things I suggested—I wasn't by any means the only person suggesting this—was that children up to the age of 16 should be exempt from the WHTI provisions. Then I also suggested that those aged 16 to 18 who were travelling in groups—hockey tournaments, baseball tournaments, marching bands—under special conditions, as long as they had adult supervision and so on, should have the opportunity to be able to travel back and forth without a passport.

I'm happy to say that the United States government accepted both of those suggestions. I want to underline that I wasn't the only one who suggested them; I assure you of that. They would have received that kind of submission from many.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Don't be so shy about claiming credit.

Hon. James J. Bradley: My friend says, "Don't be shy about claiming credit," but I want to be realistic and say that I'm sure there are many others who were submitting the same idea.

What was encouraging was that they accepted the ideas that were submitted. But invariably the people along the border, when we met, whether they were tourism officials or business officials, said that a more convenient card is necessary. That is why we wanted to develop the enhanced security licence card as an identification piece to get into the US, and for those who don't have a driver's licence, to develop such a card.

By the way, there will be two possible cards for those not drivers. One will simply be for identification purposes when it's in place, but if you wanted to enhance it, if you wanted to put citizenship on it and accept the enhancements needed, you could do that as well. It would be the choice of the individual. What we require from the federal government—and I am very optimistic, because we've had co-operation from the federal government—is information that would be available on citizenship. The privacy commissioner of Ontario has suggested that the federal government provide that to the provinces and not have a bank of such information in each province, that it would be better for the federal government to do that, and again, I'm hopeful that the federal government will indeed do that.

My friend Ted Arnott is across from me. He used to be the critic in tourism. I remember one day he got up in the House and said, "Well, why would you develop a card of this kind which simply makes it easier for Canadians to go into the US?" Of course, we do it because Canadians have asked that, but also we do it to encourage our American friends to correspondingly develop this card. I'm happy to say I read in a newspaper from New York state that as of Labour Day this year, New York state will have produced an enhanced security driver's licence that will be accepted for Americans going back into the United States.

I think we've seen some progress and some success. There isn't anybody on either side of the border who doesn't recognize the need for increased security. We also recognize, however, that we have a special relation-

ship between Canada and the United States that should be enhanced and not detracted from. Senator Coleman from Minnesota, I believe it was, said, "We should not embark upon a war on terrorism by embarking on a war on tourism," or words to that effect, and that has been repeated in different ways. Why would we do this to ourselves? The goodwill of people on both sides of the border—and I want to commend members of the United States Congress, the Congress presently elected who are sitting in the Senate and the House now, and members of state Legislatures, governors, senators and members of the administration who have modified their position when they recognized that the alternative we're providing is a reasonable alternative.

I want to say as well that this is only one alternative. People may choose not to get this if they wish, because the designation of citizenship will be on the licence. So this is voluntary on our part. In British Columbia, I should note that only 500 licences have been made available on a pilot project basis. We anticipate many more in Ontario. But what we have seen in some circumstances—and that is a choice that people make—is that some people who are close to the border have decided to get a Nexus card, as we call it, crossing the Niagara River. That requires quite a bit of background checking that takes place. Or some people have said, "Look, I travel internationally; I want to get a passport." Both of those are fine. We're providing yet another alternative for people, and I think that's what they're looking for.

I suspect, and I've noted this in the House, generally speaking, that members of all political parties in this House have said that it is desirable to have this kind of alternative. I think we recognize—each one of us, from our three political parties—the importance of having that option available to us.

I indicated that I was going to yield the floor to my colleague the parliamentary assistant in transportation, the distinguished member from Algoma-Manitoulin, and I'm going to do so at the present time.

I encourage all members of the House to give this matter serious consideration and I hope support eventually. I look forward to reading the Hansard for the comments that are going to be made on it. I know they'll all be constructive and helpful, as members of the Legislature try to be constructive and helpful on matters of this kind. I hope eventually, though that's the choice of the Legislature, that this legislation will be passed into law, enacted and that the new identification cards—licences—will be available to the citizens of Ontario as an option to be used to enter the United States.

0930

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I rise in the House today to continue the discussion on important new legislation that, if passed, would help keep people and goods moving across Ontario's borders. I do not need to remind members of the House that our borders are gateways to this province, and as a government, we must be responsible in keeping them safe, open and accessible to help maintain a strong and prosperous economy.

Our proposed legislation, the Photo Card Act, is a step in the right direction. It supports Ontario's plans to improve the flow of trade and travel between our province and our neighbouring American states.

This proposed legislation would pave the way for the creation of secure photo identification cards for Ontarians, including an enhanced driver's licence card that contains citizenship information. A new, enhanced version of the Ontario driver's licence would become an acceptable travel document, a passport alternative, for Ontarians to use at all Canada-US land and sea border crossings.

If passed, our government will also develop a photo identification card for people who do not drive or who are unable to drive. Like the enhanced driver's licence, the enhanced photo card could be used as a convenient passport alternative, something that you could have in your wallet or purse.

Millions of US citizens visit Ontario every year. They come here to spend their hard-earned dollars. These visitors pour hundreds of millions of dollars into our province's economy, and we cannot afford to keep them away.

As many of us are already aware, the United States government has started implementing the western hemisphere travel initiative, WHTI, one of the key recommendations from the 9/11 commission report. The western hemisphere travel initiative is being implemented in stages. Since January of last year, travellers entering the United States by air have been required to present a passport or other accepted secure document proving citizenship. Since January of this year, travellers crossing into the United States by land and sea have also been required to show proof of citizenship with their identification, such as a birth certificate. On June 1, 2009, all travellers entering the US will be asked to present either a passport or an acceptable passport alternative at the border.

As a province, we have to be ready. Our economy depends on it, and the people of Ontario depend on us.

A recent Canadian Tourism Research Institute study estimates that border delays cost Ontario more than \$5 billion annually. Without new measures to deal with the new western hemisphere travel initiative rules, it has been predicted that Ontario could lose nearly 1.5 million US visitors every year unless we take action now—not to mention the added congestion at our borders if people cannot safely and freely cross.

The statistics speak for themselves: Right now, about 55% of Canadians hold a valid passport. Not everybody has a passport.

Ontario's long-standing position has been to support the US government's goals of improving security. At the same time, we want to have this happen in a way that continues to allow the efficient flow of legitimate travel and trade.

Many other states and provinces see a definite need to pursue their own enhanced driver's licence and photo card programs. Michigan expects to implement its pro-

gram in early 2009. Manitoba intends to implement its program in the fall of 2008. British Columbia has already launched a pilot program of the enhanced driver's licence. Quebec is aggressively planning the implementation of a new card. New York expects to implement its program in the summer of 2008.

As a province, we cannot stand by. We must take action now. Ontarians need safe and secure alternatives so we can access our borders in time for the 2009 western hemisphere travel initiative deadline. Our neighbours expect us to move forward with our enhanced driver's licence and photo card programs to protect the safe and efficient flow of people and goods across our borders.

As an aside, I would just mention that I've had the opportunity, with many members from all sides of the House, to work with Americans in the states that border Ontario; in fact, states in the Midwest and eastern US in general.

I had the opportunity about this time last year to be in Washington, DC, with a senator from Indiana who was a co-chair of an international committee of the Midwest conference of American state legislators. We had the opportunity to visit senior officials of homeland security and discuss WHTI with them at that point and how we would deal with it, just to get their views on where they were in the implementation. Later, the next day, we also had the opportunity to talk to people at the state department. There is a tremendous willingness in the US, especially along the border, as the minister said, to find acceptable alternatives. But when we were at homeland security, one of the interesting things, to me anyway, was that the next day people from homeland security were coming to Ontario to see if our driver's licences were secure—how we actually issued them, the actual technical way we produced driver's licences in Ontario. They came and they found that to be acceptable. At the time, it was the very next day they were coming here to Ontario to do that. So we were working very hard on both sides of the border to make sure that we do have secure borders, but we also allow people and goods to move across the borders in a particularly efficient way.

I am the son of a customs officer at Sarnia who later was the manager of customs at Sarnia, so I know something about borders. I remember that in the early days—like most people who grew up along the border, we had family on both sides of the border—you could cross the border in a totally different way. I think the Speaker would know that; he's from near a border too. We all have people who move across the borders on a regular basis. In those friendlier times it was so much easier. But the world has changed, and we have to find methods of making sure that we can meet the realities of the world we live in. I think this particular legislation—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Was that before the Blue Water Bridge?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No, it wasn't before the Blue Water Bridge. I thank the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I remember when they built it; I was there.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: In 1936; right. I digress.

Anyway, as I was saying, it was a different time. Now we need to find a document that works. I think that with the will of all members of the House we will find that solution. I'm looking forward to an interesting debate on second reading. There are certainly privacy concerns that need to be addressed. There are issues that will be raised that are obviously legitimate. I look forward to working with the members of the House to find a solution that is good for Ontario and good for Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to respond to the minister and his parliamentary assistant on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act. I commend the government for finally moving forward with this initiative. It's something that people have been looking for since 9/11, to remove some of the awkwardness that people encounter when crossing our common border with the United States. The minister said a couple of things in his address yesterday about this being part of promoting a strong economy and that "Each year, millions of US citizens visit Ontario, pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into our ... economy." Further on he said, "This is about promoting tourism and working with our neighbours." I want to touch on that because the Minister of Transportation is a former Minister of Tourism.

I think that this government missed a great opportunity when our party—our leader, John Tory, and Tim Hudak, our finance critic—

Mr. John O'Toole: Ted Arnott.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —and Ted Arnott, our tourism critic—made some significant and specific proposals that would have enhanced our economy this summer from the point of view of tourism. This card is supposed to be all about tourism. Why aren't they adopting, or at least looking at, some of the changes that we have proposed, some of the initiatives, some of the enhancements, some of the attractions and promotion things that we had put forward, specific things with regards to tax exemptions for hotel rooms and attractions and stuff like that that would help bring more tourism dollars to Ontario? The studies are showing that we're suffering in that regard.

0940

While this card is important—and, again, I commend the minister for finally moving on this; it's something we've been hoping for for some time, because people on both sides of the border have demanded it and expected it—they should be looking closely at what our party proposed with regard to promoting tourism in Ontario, and the dollars and the help to the economy that would mean. This card could be part of it, but don't forget, when the opposition proposes something, you can't just dismiss it out of hand.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I appreciate the comments that were made by both the minister and the parliamentary assistant. I thought it was a good summation of where

we're at and where we're from. I'm going to get a chance in a few minutes to start the lead for the New Democratic Party and I want to talk a little bit about how we got here, what we're doing and where we're going. I'll get a chance to talk to that a little bit later.

A question to the parliamentary assistant or the minister, whoever wants to respond: One of the things that was not mentioned in the debate is how much this is going to cost from the perspective of the citizen. We know, for example, that we're now going to have three types of photo IDs. We're going to have the basic one for anybody over 12 who needs a photo ID as a means of identification. If the person happens to be a citizen, he or she will be able to get the enhanced, which is basically the photo ID with the civic information on it, that you're a Canadian citizen. Then there is the combined one that has a driver's licence. For many people, this photo ID will be the only acceptable means of identification with a photo on it, and we want to make sure that we don't make the cost so exorbitant that it becomes an issue. For example, I'm a young 13- or 14-year-old or I'm somebody on a fixed income and I happen to live in Sarnia. I need that photo ID to get in the car and travel across with whom-ever, whenever we go across the border. Is the cost going to be so high that it will prevent people from getting it? So one of the questions I want a response to is, what do we expect the cost will be for the purchase of the various types of photo ID?

The other question I have—and I'm going to talk about this a little bit later in debate—is the issue of accessibility to these new super driver's licences, as I like to call them. I understand there's going to be a bit of a pilot—not a pilot, but it's going to be rolled out in various communities differently. I would just say, if you're living in Sault Ste. Marie or Timmins or wherever, are you going to have the same access to the application for those enhanced driver licences for the purpose of travel? If I can get a response to that, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Transportation and his parliamentary assistant for introducing this extremely important piece of legislation. I want to quickly talk about the aspect dealing with photo identification for those Ontarians who do not have a driver's licence. In the last few months, I have heard from many of my constituents in Ottawa Centre who have indicated that they do not drive, for various reasons—some are senior citizens, some have certain disabilities. This has put them in a peculiar position: They do not have a driver's licence, thus they do not have a valid photo ID, which is needed in many instances.

Recently, I received a letter from a constituent who highlighted several circumstances where a driver's licence is extremely important, and I just want to read those circumstances. She states:

“Without a driver's licence, it is difficult to:

“—board an airplane for domestic travel;

“—obtain or update an Ontario health card ... ;

“—obtain and update a library card;
 “—open and close a bank account, apply for a mortgage...;
 “—act as executor of a will and power of attorney;
 “—obtain a marriage licence;
 “—register children at local schools;
 “—register for courses at local community centres;
 “—borrow special equipment at events for disabled patrons.”

These are some of the very key things in our daily lives that we need, and this particular legislation will allow those individuals who do not drive to get an enhanced photo ID card which then can be used, as we use our driver's licence, to ensure that they continue to lead and live a normal life. So I'm extremely excited that this particular piece of legislation is being introduced.

Once again, congratulations to the Minister of Transportation and his parliamentary assistant for taking this step. It is definitely going to help many individuals in my constituency of Ottawa Centre by giving them a proper piece of photo ID in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the Minister of Transportation and his parliamentary assistant in their opening presentation on second reading of Bill 85. As we know, this bill was just introduced yesterday, so members have not had a great deal of opportunity to review its contents or consult with stakeholders. Our party has indicated support for this bill, and I'm sure that it's not going to have to receive extensive second and third reading debate, but there are important points that have to be raised.

When I got my Canadian passport a couple of years ago, my recollection is that I paid \$75 for it, if I'm not mistaken, and it was for five years. I don't think the minister or the parliamentary assistant has indicated to the House this morning how much this new, enhanced photo card is going to cost. If it's going to be effective, it will have to be much less expensive than that. I wonder if it's going to be the same cost as a driver's licence. It's \$60 or \$70, if I'm not mistaken, for a three-year driver's licence and I expect that is based on the administration cost. So I think that is an important point that needs to be clarified in this debate.

I also want to put this in perspective in terms of the tourism industry, because the minister has made reference to how this will, in his mind, benefit tourism. The minister is a former Minister of Tourism, of course, and while Minister of Tourism he advocated for this, so he is obviously following through now that he is in a position to do so as Minister of Transportation. But the fact is, the western hemisphere travel initiative has been a challenge for our tourism industry in Ontario because the American tourists we hope to attract to Ontario need the passport to get back home. That's where the confusion lies, unfortunately, and, of course, if this bill were to pass and if the government does create this new, enhanced photo ID card for Ontario residents, it doesn't directly solve that problem that we have in tourism. To some degree, I suppose, we can encourage the American states to follow our

lead, but let's keep this in perspective. This doesn't help tourism today as much as we would perhaps be led to believe by the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): A response? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to thank the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, the member for Timmins-James Bay, the member for Ottawa Centre and the member for Wellington-Halton Hills. I appreciate the constructive comments that have been made by the members.

As we move forward in this debate, I think it's extremely important and one that the government clearly hopes all members will be able to support at the end of the day. I recognize the concern about the cost that has been raised by at least two of the members, and I want to tell them that the government believes this to be in the \$35 to \$40 range for five years. A \$35 or \$40 charge to the consumer that would be, I guess, amortized over five years, so to speak, is hopefully something that can be absorbed by most Ontarians. I think that's a consideration. We should know, though, that for minors, that is, people under 16—I'm not sure of that number; I can check—there isn't a requirement that they have one of these anyway. The Americans have seen fit to allow young people travelling not to need this under certain circumstances. So, for young people, that shouldn't be a burden.

I think you have to recognize that we are working with other provincial jurisdictions, with American states and with the federal governments of both Canada and the US to find a document that is affordable, easily transportable—i.e., a driver's licence, so it's in your wallet anyway for most people—and that can be used to facilitate easy passage across the border.

I take your comments, though, under advisement and I appreciate the tone of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: First of all, I want to thank the Conservative and Liberal Parties for allowing me to go a little bit out of rotation here. Tomorrow would have been my normal day for the lead speech for the New Democratic Party, but seeing that another bill is in committee and I have to be there at the same time, I appreciate the co-operation in the House.

I want to say up front, because I want people to understand clearly where we are at as a party, that we are going to support this legislation. I think it needs to go to committee. There are a few concerns that have to be addressed and we probably can do that at committee. But I want to say up front that the New Democratic Party will be supporting this.

I want to talk a little bit about the context, about how we got here. This is probably the only debate where I have had a chance to actually speak out on this since 9/11. Unfortunately, we had that tragic day where the people in the twin towers and the people on the plane in

Pennsylvania and the people at the Pentagon were killed as a result of terrorist attacks. Clearly I am not saying for two seconds that was a good thing. It was a terrible thing, it was a tragedy. People shouldn't have to die in that way, specifically because people are unhappy about what's going on in the world, the current events and what's happening politically. You would hope that in this day and age we are civil enough that we can figure out more peaceful ways of dealing with a lot of these issues.

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In fact, the American election is going to be about that to a certain degree because you have the view of Senator Obama, who is saying, "I think it's important that we talk to all people in order to open dialogue with other leaders about issues that may be sticky." For example, he talks about talking to North Korea. On the other hand, you have Mr. McCain, the presumptive nominee for the Republicans, who is saying, "No, you shouldn't do that." Clearly, the United States is going through this debate about it being better to throw bombs or talk to people. I think I'll leave the American people to decide which way they want to go, but I know, as a Canadian citizen, we have a long history in Canada, and certainly in Europe, of diplomacy always being a better way of approaching these things.

It relates to this bill, and this is why I want to talk about this. After the tragedy of 9/11, President Bush needed to do something to retaliate and to be seen as doing something against the tragedies of the twin towers, and I understand that. He's an American citizen, his citizens were murdered, and he is the President of the United States and had to be seen as doing something. One of the things that he did was create the homeland security organization, and some of the steps they have taken since then have gone counter to the essence of a democratic society.

We, in North America, have been quite lucky. We've talked for years about Canada and the United States sharing the longest undefended border in the world. It is nothing for a Canadian or an American to cross from one side of the border to the other and goods and services to move from one side of the border to the other. Even though we are two sovereign and independent nations, the United States and Canada, we understand we have shared goals. We have an economy that is part of the North American economy and we need to do business as each other. By and large, we don't see each other as enemies; we see each other as friends. Oh yes, there is always the rivalry between the hockey clubs and the baseball clubs and even some people's political views, vis-à-vis left and right, Canada being seen as a little bit more left and the United States being seen as probably far more right than we would like, as far as right-wing politics.

What this has done, in my view, this whole debate about needing to increase security in the United States to protect ourselves from a possible terrorist attack, is fly in the face of what democratic society is all about and to require that citizens of those democracies, in Canada and

now the United States, go through some added layers of scrutiny as far as exercising our rights as citizens in a democratic society.

I remember, and some of you would remember when you were younger, watching the 1950s, early 1960s TV shows where they used to depict the Soviet Union as a country where everybody carries a gun. Remember that? They'd be at the airports, and you'd see the security guys carrying the guns at the Soviet airports or somewhere in one of the eastern nations. The police were very present and there seemed to be a sense that there was paranoia on the part of the state about people's ability to move freely within their society.

I remember thinking back then, "Boy, that's really an overreaction." As a kid, I thought, "That's silly. That's not the way things should be. We should be able to move and come and go as we please as citizens. We're not a threat to our society. We are the society." Right? I would look at these 1950ish, 1960ish Cold War type TV shows or movies, where they were really showing the paranoia of the Soviet Union and how restricted in moving freely citizens had become within their own state, because the eye of government was everywhere watching them. I thought, "Never are you going to see that in North America. Lord! We're a democratic society."

Well, I fear since 9/11 and since homeland security and the term of President Bush, we haven't gone maybe as far as the Soviets had, but certainly we're moving in the direction of the state having greater and greater control on the people's liberty to move within their own nation and the freedoms that they enjoy as far as expression etc. We've seen, for example, both in Canada and the United States, legislation that was introduced that limits a person's right to a trial. We have people who have been incarcerated in Canada for longer than would be normally allowed under the law, without any specific charges being laid, without any ability to defend themselves. Regarding the United States and what's happening in Guantanamo Bay—there may be legitimate terrorists there. I don't know. The point is that our society is built on the premise that everybody has a right to a trial, that you're innocent until proven guilty. That credo is especially true in the United States. What I've seen since 9/11 is that we've become much more restricting of the rights of individuals, and that troubles me greatly.

I don't for one second say that there aren't acts of terrorism happening in the world and that governments shouldn't do things to protect themselves and expose and try to deal with those acts of terrorism before they happen. Quite the contrary: I think the state has a responsibility. But when you take that responsibility and move to restrict your citizens, I think you might have crossed over the line.

I'm not accusing the Liberal government and the minister of having pandered to the Americans. We find ourselves living next to a very, very large neighbour. As Tommy Douglas said, the relationship between Canadians and Americans is akin to a mouse sleeping in bed

with an elephant. The mouse always has one eye open because it's worried the elephant might turn over.

That's a bit where we're at between Canada and the United States. Homeland security has decided that Canadian citizens will not be allowed into their country unless we have some means of identifying that these people are true Canadians and don't pose a threat to the United States. We're standing there on the other side of the border, shaking our heads, saying, "Listen, we've been your neighbour since our countries were born"—the United States in 1776, and Canada in 1867. We don't have a long history of lobbing bombs at each other and harbouring terrorists. Those things happen within the United States, as they can happen outside of the United States.

I would propose, despite this legislation and most other things that homeland security has done, that the United States is no safer than it was pre-homeland security measures, because if you're a terrorist and you want to take an act of terrorism to the soil of the United States, it ain't going to be a photo ID from Ontario that's going to stop you. I don't like that, but that's the reality.

Again, I'm not speaking against this legislation. I'm just speaking to the point that we might have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, especially the Americans and our federal government to a degree. We're stepping into very dangerous waters when we start restricting people's rights within a democratic society to freely assemble and travel and to speak and to act out according to what they want, within the confines of our Constitution. Our Constitution says people have the right to assemble, our Constitution says people have the right to expression, and our Constitution says people have the right to a trial. Where are we since 9/11? Much of that, especially in the United States and to some degree in Canada, has been somewhat limited.

I just wanted to start the debate by speaking to that a little bit.

Again, I don't accuse the government of anything. They didn't cause this issue. This is an issue where the President of the United States created homeland security, and they had to find something to do. They felt that somehow or other terrorists were coming in from Canada and that we were some sort of a threat, so they had to shut down the borders in some way. But I really think this is an overreaction.

The issue is, if they want to deal with the issue of terrorism, maybe they should start changing their foreign policy. My, that would be refreshing. Rather than sending in bombs and aircraft carriers and the Fifth Fleet as a response to political problems in other parts of the world, maybe the United States should try some diplomatic approaches.

If we take a look at the history of Europe, Great Britain used to be much what the United States is today. Great Britain, prior to the First World War, was the superpower of the day, and those Brits learned something over the years. They learned that, yes, they had a large navy and, yes, they had a large military, but they suffered

lots of losses as a result of wars that they had with various nations. The Brits learned after a while, especially after the First World War, that diplomatic mechanisms were better for resolving some of these things than trying to resolve things militarily. If you take a look at what happened after the First and Second World Wars, the Europeans took quite a different approach in the sense that they changed their foreign policy, not to make it reactionary but to try to be a little bit more proactive in dealing with some of these issues. Unfortunately, the Americans still need to learn that lesson. It's going to be interesting in this fall's presidential election because that debate should be prevalent, considering that Obama seems to have won the nomination for the Democrats and certainly Mr. McCain has for the Republicans, and they both represent a different view on this issue.

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I just wanted to start off the debate by talking about how it's sad that we have to pass this kind of legislation. I don't fault the Ontario government for doing it. If I were in government, I would have to do it as well. So I'm not for one second saying that the McGuinty government is kowtowing to the George Bush administration. The reality is that we live next to the Americans and we've got to figure out how to work with them. They have laws that say that they want this. We need to figure out how to make it as non-intrusive as possible to our citizens, and that's what this legislation does: It tries to find a bit of a balance—where not everybody has got to run out for a passport—to having some means of identification that allows us to continue to travel to and from the United States with the least amount of trouble as possible. So, enough said about that. I just wanted to put that on the record because I think how we got here needs to be said.

As for the legislation—oh boy, where do I start? Probably the best place to start is to talk a little bit about what the legislation does, for those members who may not have had a chance to read the act—I did so last night—and the people who might be watching. The legislation is not a bad piece of legislation. I think there are a few things that we're going to need to take a look at at committee. Basically, what we're doing is we're creating a photo ID type of identification, tied to a driver's licence or others, to give people easier access to crossing the borders.

There are three photo IDs that you're going to be able to get under this legislation. You're going to have the basic identification, which is where a person aged 12 and over can walk into a Ministry of Transportation office and say, "I want photo ID." Currently, there are not a lot of ways of getting photo ID other than a health card, and a health card is not always accepted everywhere. So if you don't have a driver's licence and you need photo ID to do some of the things such as were talked about by the member from Ottawa—and you need photo ID for applications for everything nowadays, for credit etc.—this will be a way for people to get that.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The LCBO.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The LCBO is a good example. You need photo ID when you're 19 years of age.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: They card you all the time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I got carded at the airport one day, and I thought it was ridiculous. A 50-year-old guy goes to the airport to buy a beer and he gets carded. I thought, boy, this is wonderful. I said to the guy, "Do I look that young?" He said, "No. We card everybody." Anyway, that's a whole other story. I thought it was a compliment; it turns out he was carding everybody who came in.

Anyway, my point is that Michael Prue, our member from Beaches–East York, has raised this issue a number of times. I know he had sent letters to the Minister of Transportation on this particular issue and advocated, along with other members in this House, to basically create a photo ID through the Ministry of Transportation so that people who do not have driver's licences would have an ability to apply for a photo ID that they can use for identification. That's the first part that this bill does: It creates a basic photo ID card that has your picture, says where you live, who you are and identifies you. So if you need to apply for a library card or buy a bottle of scotch or whatever it might be, you've got a photo ID in the event that you need one for application for whatever.

The second piece of information, the second type of ID coming out, is what's called the enhanced ID. That is for Canadian citizens who don't have a driver's licence or don't want a driver's licence and want to have a photo ID with their citizenship within the card. I believe that that card would not only allow them to use the ID within Canada, as far as the regular stuff—you know, going into the LCBO etc.—but it would also allow them to cross the border. In other words, I am the passenger in the car, I'm the passenger on the tour bus or I'm flying from city A to city B, from Canada to the United States. I would be able to use that, even though I don't have a driver's licence.

I think that's well thought through, because we need to recognize that it's not just people who drive cars who have the need to travel into the United States. On this point—having the enhanced card—I give the ministry credit for having thought that one through, because that was one of the things that concerned me at the beginning. I had some discussions with people about it. As Mr. Bradley said, I'm not going to take credit for it. I'm sure other people thought about this before me, but good. We've said it's not just drivers who need to travel into the United States, it's also citizens who don't have driver's licences.

The other thing is the combined card, which is basically that the person who does have a valid driver's permit will get photo ID and citizenship information on the card and get their driver's licence all in one, so that you can cross into the United States using your driver's licence. Rather than having a passport, a driver's licence, a health card and whatever else, you can just use your enhanced driver's licence, I guess I would call it.

I want to say that the reason we're doing this is because the government understands, as the opposition does, that the Americans have made a decision by way of

homeland security, and we need to move towards trying to find some way to make it easier for the citizens of Ontario to travel to and from the United States without having to go through the bother and the pain of applying for a passport. Hopefully this legislation, once passed, if passed, will give Ontario citizens that right. That's still to be determined to a certain extent, because the United States, being who they are and the way they operate, have not completely endorsed this, but at least we're moving forward with a few of the American states on this particular issue.

That brings me to a couple of concerns I have about the logistics of all of this. The first thing, and the parliamentary assistant spoke to it a little bit, is the issue of cost. Many people need to apply for the photo ID because it's the only means they have to identify themselves. The question I asked earlier of the parliamentary assistant was, "How much is this going to cost the individual?" I think the parliamentary assistant said it was between \$35 and \$40. For most people, that's probably not a big thing. For some more than others, it will be, especially if you're a younger person who is still at school. You have a number of high school students who are over 16 who may have need of this card. For example, they may travel with their parents into the United States. I suppose mom and dad can pay, but it's still an issue of cost to a certain degree. The only point I would make is that I'll be interested in hearing at committee from the people who come to present on this issue. Do they think that's a reasonable number? On the surface it might be, but is it? The question becomes, once we get to committee, should there be a sliding scale for rates with regard to how much you pay for these cards? For example, if you're a student, should you have to pay the same rate as an adult? There needs to be recognition that the person doesn't only have substantial expenses as a student—especially if they're in college or university, as far as loans they may need to get to school—but they don't have the income. So should we have a bit of a sliding scale on the fees you have to pay in order to get this card, this photo ID, or the enhanced ID or the combined ID? Should we have a different rate?

What about children under the age of 16? Yes, they don't need to have this enhanced ID to travel into the United States, because they're going to exempt kids under the age of 16, but there are a lot of people—13, 14, 12, whatever it might be—who are going to need this type of ID for very basic things that we do within our own communities. Again, is \$35 to \$40 reasonable to them? I ask the pages: You guys are in grade 7 or 8. How easy is it to come up with 40 bucks? Pretty tough. You had better hope mom and dad have the money. Again, I want to hear at committee, do we need to have a different rate for children under the age of 16? They are citizens as well. Just because they happen to be under voting age and under 16 years of age, they have to interact within our society. Many of them need ID for all kinds of different reasons; not necessarily for travel into the United States, but for basic applications for things they may need themselves, such as a library card, or identi-

fication to get into some events. Often photo ID is required. So should we have a different rate for kids under the age of 16?

When this bill goes to committee, I want to see if we're actually going to have those concerns raised: cost of the card for kids under the age of 16 and cost of the card for young people, especially if they're students. Should there be a different rate, and is the rate of \$35 to \$40 reasonable? I imagine it's going to be more for the driver's licence, I take it. I just assume that, because—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member from the government side is saying it's going to be the same for a driver's licence. I take it what that means is I will be able to renew my licence every five years. Well, that's not a bad thing, then. For me, I'm okay with that. It saves me the bother of having to do it every, I think, two years.

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Mr. Michael A. Brown: Five.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Is it five? Okay, I thought it was every two. What do I know? It goes to show you can be in this place a long time and sometimes get it wrong.

For myself as a person who makes a very good salary, \$35 to \$40 is not an issue, but it might be for others.

The other issue in regards to the logistics of this thing is the whole issue of access, to be able to get the card. I didn't hear a response from the parliamentary assistant to the minister on that issue. The question is this: As I understand it, the minister was telling me that as we move toward this, should this legislation pass, there are going to be areas where these cards will be issued fairly soon. You need to put a whole mechanism in place in order to be able to do this. You have to have access to the federal database so that you can identify the person as a citizen. Obviously, you need some sort of change to the computer systems that we have at the Ministry of Transportation of some type; I don't know.

Second of all, you're going to need the ability to have the photo taken. I understand there's also in this legislation, as I read through it—I forget which section; if I had my glasses, I would know, because I marked it off here—section 6, photo comparison technology. This is actually a good thing, and I'll talk about that a little bit later, where a picture is taken of the individual who does the application.

It is not only put just on the driver's licence or the basic card, but it's also utilized in order to identify the person in the future. If the person comes back for re-application of a licence under another name, for example, they would compare the photos and they would know that this face belongs to Gilles Bisson. So I can't go in and apply for a driver's licence as John Doe and use that other ID for fraudulent reasons. I'll come to that a little bit later.

But my point is, does the ministry currently have the capacity to absorb the applications that are going to come forward from citizens in Ontario wanting to get this card? For example, where I come from in Timmins, as everywhere else, we have people who travel into the United

States on a regular basis. Some of them are going to want to get this particular card, this combined driver's licence. So the question becomes, will I be able to apply at an MTO office anywhere in Ontario to get one of these cards, and will I be able to get it reasonably quick?

I understand that they're going to be doing this in regions closer to the border first. That's how it's going to basically unfold. So if these cards are available, one of the things that I think we need to talk about and look at in committee again is, does the ministry have the capacity to roll this out? Do we have the capacity staff-wise? Do we have the capacity technology-wise to roll this out?

I see the parliamentary assistant is nodding yes. I would remind you, though, and you're going to know what I'm talking about—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, you're agreeing. I thought you were saying, "Yes." Okay, I hear you.

But all of us know because we've gone through this fiasco for about a year over passports. When homeland security and the American administration changed the rules so that you needed a passport to enter the United States, our offices were swamped with passport applications. I happen to be in a joint office with my federal member, Charlie Angus, so we got them all. We got the ones who went to the provincial member and the ones that went to the federal member wanting to get passports.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, there were the birth certificates but I'm not going to get there.

Mr. Mike Colle: And the birth certificates.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yeah, I know; I understand that.

But my point was that the federal government did not have the capacity to deal with the onslaught of passport applications. So people were coming into our offices, applying for passports and having to wait, in some cases, three and four months to get their passport, when they had planned a trip two months ahead. People were jumping this high as they were coming into our offices and saying, "What gives here? I've got a trip to Aruba in January. I applied for my passport in October. I should have got it by now. I don't have anything back. I will not be able to travel."

Our offices—I'd imagine it was the same with your offices—had to intercede with the post office, with the people who do the courier services, with the passport office. Their MP liaison in Ottawa—my God, their offices were swamped with calls, all because, when the federal government in the United States said, "You have to have a passport to come into the United States," the Canadian government, being Stephen Harper, did like that little bobble in the back of the car and said, "Yes, Mr. Bush. Everything you say, I will do." Anyway, that's my making fun of Stephen Harper. I'm obviously not a big fan.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I'm a big fan of Jack Layton. You've got that right. Jack Layton should be the Prime Minister of Canada. I think he'd make a great Prime

Minister. I'll tell you: We'd be far better off under a New Democratic government federally. I agree with the Liberal member for Oriole—whatever the riding is. Is it Oriole?

Hon. David Caplan: Don Valley East.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It used to be Oriole.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: See—I go back a ways.

Anyway, I only say that the federal government did not have the capacity to deal with the increased applications for passports. As a result, Canadian citizens were put off because they couldn't get their passports in time. I'll tell you, we worked hard in our offices—Charlie Angus and myself, and our staff especially—at tracking people's passports. I remember instances of having to call the post office on a Sunday to get them to open, because we figured out by the tracking number that the darned passport had arrived on Saturday night and was sitting in the post office, and people were travelling at 6 o'clock in the morning on Monday. So it was like a horror story, all because the federal government did not have the capacity to deal with the increased applications.

All I'm saying is: If this legislation passes at third reading and gets royal assent and Ontario citizens know that they can get these photo ID cards, I could well imagine that there is going to be an onslaught of applications. There are many people in Ontario who travel to the United States, and they're going to say, "Okay, let me see if I've got this figured out. Forty bucks for a combined driver's licence"—how much is it for a passport now?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's \$75.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought it was more than that. It's over \$100, I thought. But even if it's \$75, my point is that the citizen is going to say, "Apply for a passport to travel to the United States at \$75 or get my enhanced or combined driver's licence for forty bucks." The choice is going to be pretty simple.

I'm saying here today in the House—and remember: This is recorded in Hansard—the ministry had better have the capacity to deal with the onslaught of applications, because we will end up where the federal government ended up when it came to the passports. So on the issue of capacity, we need to do that.

The second issue is that we need to make sure that every MTO office that issues drivers' licences across this province has the capacity to deliver. I don't pretend for one second to believe I understand everything that has to happen logistically to make this happen, but they're going to need more staff. They're going to need the ability to take these enhanced photos that—what do they call it again? I always have to look at what it's called. It's called photo comparison technology. We're going to need equipment to make that happen. We're going to have to have our databases changed in some way etc. I hope we don't end up in a situation where border communities have it available today and everybody else has to wait till later, because I can tell you that people in Barrie, Timmins, Sudbury and other places aren't going to be too happy, as the member for Algoma-Manitoulin

well knows, and being an advocate for people in northern Ontario, he has some sympathy for what I have to say. So we need to make sure we have the capacity to issue.

The other thing I want to talk about before I get into a few other things is that I have been raising in this House the issue of the individual in Kingston who, unfortunately, drove a vehicle when he was impaired and, as a result of that, four people were killed. The man was charged with manslaughter and went to jail for a period of time. The sad story is that once the person was released from jail, he walked into a Ministry of Transportation office and, depending on the version, either because the ministry or the court made a mistake or the guy fraudulently changed his date of birth—God knows which one it is; everybody has a different version—the person was issued a brand new driver's licence and went back behind the wheel and started to drive. The problem we have is that the person was caught solely because he was pulled over for a driving infraction, for an offence of some type. When the police ran his licence number through the CPIC database, which is the federal RCMP database that's tied to everything, they caught this guy as a suspended driver, because he had been impaired and had a lifetime ban. Here's the interesting part: The same person walked into a Ministry of Transportation office, and that wasn't flagged.

That's pretty scary. It's pretty scary that you can walk into a Ministry of Transportation office, and either because of an error by them or because you fraudulently changed your first name—and that's easy to do. All you've got to do is go to the ORG, apply for a name change, have your name changed from John Doe to George Doe and you're a new person because the ministry database looks at the person's first and last names as the criteria when they do the search string.

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One of the issues I've been raising in this House is that we need to enhance the way the Ontario database works so that those fraudulent applications for drivers' licences by people who either (a) were suspended or (b) are trying to get a driver's licence illegally can be caught. This legislation might give us an opportunity to deal with some of that. For example, this whole photo comparison technology I think is something that would have caught this particular case because a picture would have been taken of this individual in Kingston, whose picture would have been on file, and if he went in and applied as John Doe versus Randy Smith, he would have been caught because the identification would have been done through the picture.

The other thing we need to look at in the MTO database—there has to be some discussion. Listen, parliamentary assistant to the minister, this is simple. All right? You guys at MTO need to pick up the phone and call the RCMP. That's the federal police. You need to talk about how you're able to put a flag between your two databases because what happens is, if there's an offence that you're charged with and you lose your driver's licence—because it's a charge—it ends up in the CPIC database.

Because it's either a provincial offence or it's a criminal offence, it ends in the CPIC database. Any time you're charged with a provincial offence or a criminal offence, it ends up in the CPIC database, and all we need is a flag between those two databases. The MTO database has to flag the RCMP CPIC database to say, "This person's in the CPIC database," and that should then provoke a manual search on the part of the agent who is issuing the licence to find out why that is.

Now, we don't want to merge those two databases together because of privacy issues. There's far more information in the RCMP CPIC database than I want the MTO getting their hands on. Quite frankly, those are issues of privacy. But certainly, you have to have a flag, and if we had a flag between the RCMP CPIC database and the MTO database, if a person goes in who has been charged criminally or under a provincial offence and applies for a driver's licence, that would be automatically flagged by the MTO office. If there was a ban on the driver's licence, we would know right away because the clerk would say, "Hold it a second. I've got to find out what's going on." They would make an inquiry in regard to why it is that person has been flagged. The question would be, "Has this person's licence been revoked, yes or no?" That's all we need to know. I don't know what the person needs to be charged with. It might be a criminal offence; that's none of my business. But the CPIC people can say, "No, the person does not have a revoked driver's licence." "Fine, we can reissue." End of story.

It would be a very simple thing to do. So I really encourage the provincial government, under the leadership of Mr. Bradley and Mr. Brown, to contact their federal counterparts to talk about how we're able to flag the CPIC database back to the provincial MTO database. That would catch it and we would know for sure at that point between what's in this bill and what could be put into this bill when it comes to security and what happens with the CPIC database. We know that we would not have a repeat of what happened in Kingston.

I end this particular issue by just saying this: The minister, the other day, in response to my question, said, "Oh, well, you know, this was like a one-off. This was a one-in-a-million kind of thing." I'm sorry. There are a lot of people out there who have drivers' licences who shouldn't have them. Let's not kid ourselves.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't mention my name.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I will not mention the member's name.

It is not that hard to go out and get another driver's licence. We know, for example, that there are people who get drivers' licences illegally, and we've seen it through some of these issuing offices that we have out there now that have been privatized. Basically, for a fee, you can bypass the process and get yourself a driver's licence. That person may not be a safe driver. We have a system in Ontario where we want people to go through a process to make sure they're safe behind the wheel. In the case of persons being banned or having their drivers' licences revoked for whatever reason, it's not all that difficult to

get another one, as we learned through this case in Kingston. All it took was a different year of birth on the person's application, and so be it. I just say we need to make sure that we fix this, and there are two ways of doing: part of it in this legislation and the other part of it in the flag between the CPIC database and this one.

I want to talk about a few of the privacy issues. It comes back to what I was talking about earlier in regard to our friend Mr. Bush, the President of the United States for the next seven or eight months. I said earlier it's unfortunate that the United States has become much more restrictive when it comes to what its citizens can and can't do since 9/11. We understand the tragedy of 9/11, and I don't diminish that for one second. That was a tragedy. It was clearly an act of terrorism and should not be condoned. That's not my point. But as a reaction to it, we have limited people's rights within the United States, and in Canada to a certain degree.

One of the problems with this legislation is this whole radio frequency identification technology. I understand why they want to put it on the enhanced card or the combined card so that when you're driving up to the border you would be able to go through a little bit quicker. The problem is that this stuff doesn't turn off. It has a range of probably hundreds of feet, but the signal that comes off the card is always on. You cannot turn it off. What happens if a store or individuals are able to figure out how to tap into that frequency? There's a legitimate privacy concern. I'm not saying this is going to happen, but let's put forward a couple of scenarios. Wal-Mart decides that they've figured out how to track people by tapping into this frequency. That's a lot of information: "How many times do people come back into our stores? What time are they coming in?"—all of that kind of information. I'm not saying Wal-Mart would do it, but I'm using them because they're the biggest target. They're the biggest general store, so why not pick on them? I'm not going to pick on ma and pa in downtown Timmins, right? That wouldn't be fair. My point is, you could end up in a situation where somebody figures out how to tap into these frequencies and is able to track what individual citizens are doing in all kinds of ways that we don't want to have happen.

I think when we go to committee—and I don't want this bill to rush through committee. We need to have this bill in committee this summer, to give some people a chance to think about this so that we're able to look at this issue as to how we can make sure that if this RFID technology is used, which is these signals within the cards—the idea is that you would have a driver's licence that would have a chip in it and then the chip would basically alert the border patrol that you're coming and let you through a little bit quicker. But can that technology be used by others for what it was not intended to do?

We can all stand here in the House and say that will never happen, but we know there are all kinds of unscrupulous people in our society. Certainly to God, I'm not for utilizing that technology for bad reasons, and I don't think anybody in this House is. So I say we need to

make sure that we are able to look at that issue a little bit closer at committee. I look forward to having experts come before us and talk about that particular part of it.

The other thing is the information that MTO will be collecting, because they're not just going to be doing what they do now. When I go to the MTO office and apply for my driver's licence, they get my name, my middle name, my last name, my date of birth and my address. There is going to be a little bit more information than that on the cards, obviously citizenship information. We need to make sure that the databases are secure. Again, I don't know if they will or will not be. I'm not saying they're not, but I think we need to ask the question. It's a very legitimate question to ask the ministry as it comes before a committee: "What steps have you taken to make sure that the additional information we're now going to be getting is made secure?" We remember what happened in the FRO under the Conservatives. Do you remember that one, where they closed the Family Responsibility Office in Sudbury and everybody else's regional offices, and they took all that information and put it in boxes inside a building in Downsview? There was a lot of information that was unsecured. This stuff was out there for people to see: court records as far as how much a person had to pay, what the conditions of visitation were. All that information was there. Anybody could have grabbed that.

I want to make sure when we're in committee that we ask the ministry, "What steps are you taking to make sure that the information you currently have and the information you will be getting is made secure so that within the ministry there are proper safeguards for this information not to be leaked or not to be viewed by other people who shouldn't be seeing it?" Clearly, we need to do that.

On the last part of the security—I just stopped there because I remembered—it would be good to get the privacy commissioner to come before our committee. We should be asking the privacy commissioner, quite frankly, to look at this legislation—we should be making that request through the committee—and for her to come back and to tell us what she thinks. That's what the privacy commissioner does, and she has the staff to be able to do that.

1030

If we're going to be providing this type of card and technology to the province, I think we as legislators need to do everything we can to make sure that we protect the privacy of individuals. I see the parliamentary assistant is agreeing with me.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, I see you're agreeing, and other members. I look forward to that happening, and we need to make sure that we hear from the privacy commissioner in order to make that happen.

I just want to end on this particular point, and that's the role of committee. Sometimes—and we don't do this for the wrong reasons—we think we understand our legislation far more than we do, if you know what I mean, as parliamentary assistant, critic or minister. I read

the legislation, as the member did, and I think I somewhat understood it. But who knows, right? There may be something I misread. Often what happens is that we hurry the stuff through the committee process.

For example, we got Bill 41, the speed limiters legislation, going to committee tomorrow. You will know, as parliamentary assistant—you're getting the same e-mails as me: "How come I didn't get a chance to present? The cut-off date was Tuesday for presentations" etc. So often what ends up happening is that by the time the public hears a bill is coming, and they decide to apply to committee to come and have their say, they end up being barred out because the process has been truncated and sped up.

All I'm saying to the minister and the parliamentary assistant in this case is that this is legislation that I don't think we should be hurrying up too much. I don't have a problem with passing it. It'll be fine to get second reading this spring and get it into committee for the summer. We may or may not need a lot of committee time, but what we do need is an adequate amount of time to let Ontarians know that this legislation is coming, to reach out to people who know more about security and privacy issues than we do, so that they're able to come before our committee and give us their best advice about how we make this bill work in the way we intend it to.

I tell you now, as a member of the New Democratic Party and the critic for transportation, we're not going to hold this up at third reading; we don't have any intention of doing that. And we have no intention of holding this up in committee. But we need sufficient time to give people notice. We may only need one or two days of committee time. I don't know; it'll depend on the requests. But I don't want to be in a position, as we were with the Bill 41, the speed limiters bill, where people feel that they didn't get enough time to make application to present to committee. So on this legislation, I think we need to be able to do that.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: That's some nerve on your part.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The reality is, I wasn't available Friday for the subcommittee meeting. I understand that.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: What about the other times?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The first request I had was last Friday, just so you know. That was the first request.

So the point—the regional deal on Bill 41, as I understood it as the whip—was that Bill 41 was actually going to travel in the summer. That was the original deal as I understood it, so this was not even on our radar screen. So a lot of people are feeling a little bit left out.

I'm just saying, let's not repeat that with this bill. I want to put it clearly on the record, as the critic for the New Democratic Party, that this bill should have adequate time for the public to be notified. People should get adequate time for notification for when this bill will be in committee. A day or a week is not going to be enough. We need to make sure that this thing is posted. We need to reach out to the privacy commissioner and others to let them know that we need them to come out

and to give us some learned advice about what this bill can and can't do and what we should change, and then bring the bill back for third reading this spring.

With that, I want to thank you. That's all the time I need in this debate. I look forward to the questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'll just take a minute or so to make some comments on the statement by my neighbour here from James Bay.

I want to say up front that I think he's very sincere in his debate. I think the questions that he raises are, in part, legitimate. I'm delighted to see that, in general, we are in agreement that this has to be done. It's things like this that arise from time to time through a change in world conditions, I guess, if one must say.

I think both the minister and the parliamentary assistant have acknowledged that it's going to go to committee and there'll be that opportunity for the public to give that input. Not just on this particular issue, but on many other issues it's very important that information comes from the ground up, because those are the folks who are going to be lining up, whether it's at the liquor store or a border crossing, or even when they go to register for college or university and they don't have a driver's licence—some of the challenges that I know my office hears about sometimes regarding not having proper identification. Right now, even for those minor incidents where identification is needed when people go to those offices, they don't know if they have the right type of identification that could put them through, and normally that leaves a lot of frustration.

So I'm delighted we're moving forward on this. Is it going to fix all the problems? Probably not, but I think we're all heading in the right direction. I'm delighted to support the comments that were made and also to try to move this ahead as quickly as we can.

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the brief moment that I have, I just want to suggest that, to me, the issue is the balance of the issues around privacy and the challenges of security. I think that it's incumbent upon the government to use the best and the newest technology at their disposal to be able to provide a secure system, and that's why there's a general recognition of the need for the government to go forward in this. But I also would agree with the previous speaker about the importance of making sure we have it right, that we are not creating a system that puts people's privacy at risk. It is through the process of public comment and public hearings that we are able to understand some of the challenges that a bill such as this provides.

I think the most important thing to keep in mind is that at the end of the day this has to meet the test of confidence at the border. It has to be something that in fact does what it says it will do in a way that is cost-effective.

We recognize the importance of that balance of privacy, the security of our records and also the broader issue of security for our borders. I think that making sure

those things are guaranteed by this legislation is really the essence of the debate here.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Ça me fait plaisir de participer à ce projet de loi tellement attendu par les Ontariens et Ontariennes. Ce projet de loi permettra l'obtention de deux différentes cartes, tout d'abord le permis de conduire avec une photo ainsi que les renseignements nécessaires. Le gouvernement McGuinty propose la mise en circulation d'un permis de conduire spécial plastifié, sur lequel figureront des renseignements sur la citoyenneté. Ce permis de conduire spécial deviendra un document de voyage acceptable, un substitut de passeport, pour se rendre aux États-Unis par voie terrestre ou maritime. Oui, nous savons que, actuellement, selon l'information reçue, à compter du 1^{er} juin 2009, toutes personnes n'ayant pas un passeport ou une carte telle que proposée par le gouvernement McGuinty ne pourront pas se rendre aux États-Unis par voie terrestre ou maritime. Actuellement, nous savons que par la voie des airs, il est obligatoire d'avoir un passeport. Cette carte sera vendue au coût de 40 \$. Si une personne doit obtenir un passeport, le coût actuel régulier est de 85 \$, et je crois qu'il y a une augmentation.

Mais l'important de ce projet de loi est l'obtention d'une carte d'identité pour une personne n'ayant pas de permis de conduire. Nous savons depuis longtemps que l'ombudsman de l'Ontario a fait des recommandations au ministère des Transports demandant à ce que le gouvernement McGuinty se penche sur cette demande faite par les aveugles, par exemple, et aussi par les étudiants et étudiantes de l'Ontario n'ayant pas de permis de conduire. Mais cette carte sera à la disposition de tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes qui n'ont pas de permis de conduire, et ils pourront l'obtenir afin de se rendre plus facilement aux États-Unis.

1040

Mr. John O'Toole: I am very pleased to respond to the member from Timmins-James Bay. As has been indicated, I believe this side of the House, the opposition party, is in support of Bill 85.

That being said, you look at the bill here. A couple of points have been made. I just recently had to renew my driver's licence, and today's driver's licence was \$74 for one year, \$148 for two years. So I know that.

I'm wondering now, with this new ID attached to a driver's licence, how much it's going to be. I'm a little bit worried, without too much accountability and openness here. The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Finance just love to get your hand in your pocket. Before we concede complete agreement on this—because it is the right thing to do—how much is it going to cost? Every time they do something over there, it costs more.

The economy right now is troubling. In fact, this doesn't solve, as the minister said, some of the problems of the transborder issues. Americans coming in here won't have one of these cards and they'll have to have a passport to get back, under the rules. So American tourism will not, as has been suggested, actually be im-

proved. Tourism is extremely important as we enter this season.

Mr. Tory and our party came up with a plan, which was to remove the retail sales tax on Ontario hotels and attractions for the summer months. We have a plan here that would have stimulated tourism this summer. Perhaps it's separate from this Bill 85, which is a bill that really allows the Minister of Transportation and the McGuinty government to issue one of three types of identifications. We have no idea what it's going to cost to set it up, how much it's going to cost for the consumer to purchase. And is it really going to provide any real support for tourism?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Timmins–James Bay, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I appreciate the comments made by the various members who actually supported most of what I had to say. I will only repeat that I think the important part of this thing is that we need to make sure that privacy issues are dealt with so that the information that MTO has on these new driver's licences or photo IDs is not misused. I think we need to make sure that we have the privacy commissioner come before our committee in order to deal with this, so that we can have the expert advice of her office about how we make sure that we safeguard the information and how we utilize these new cards in the future.

I guess the last point is that we need to really make sure that we have time in committee to deal with this. Again, I want to be real clear to the minister and the parliamentary assistant. I'm not asking for extensive public hearings on this. What I'm saying is that we need to post it out there so that people can see it, so they have sufficient time to be able to figure out that this is coming, that we be somewhat proactive in our approach—that we reach out to some people as a committee who we think might be interested in this issue, and then basically allow them to decide if they want, or not, to present to committee.

We may in the end only need a day. We may only need two or three. I don't know. I just want to make sure that we get this right, as we move forward. As I said earlier, it's unfortunate that we need this type of identification in Ontario. The Americans have basically forced this on us, so we have no choice but to deal with it. Nonetheless, if we're going to do it, let's make sure, as humanly as we possibly can, that we get the legislation right and that we make sure that citizens' right to privacy is protected so that it's not misused in any way.

With that, I want to thank you for this time in debate and I look forward to the time we'll have on committee for this particular legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for debate is adjourned.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome some guests here to the chamber today.

On behalf of the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and on behalf of page Chris Jefferies: I'd like to welcome Andrew Jefferies, his father, Rosanna Jefferies, his mother, Daniel Jefferies, Alexandra Jefferies, Donnajean Jefferies, Jim Jefferies, Tony Basacco and Lena Basacco.

On behalf of page Ellen Tomaino: Sitting in the gallery today are her mother Julie, her father Mike, her sister Heike, brother Jay, brother Willi, grandmother Faith Tomaino, grandfather Peter Tomaino, her aunt Christine Walker, cousins Sarah Walker and Matt Walker and cousin David Petriw.

As well, on behalf of page Murray Fallis: His mother Wendy McQuaig and his grandmother Lois Fallis are in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member for Mississauga–Erindale, I'd like to welcome to the House today the grade 5 class from Edenrose Public School in Mississauga. They are visiting the Legislature today.

As well, a belated anniversary yesterday to the class of 1999, of which I am a member, elected nine years ago. To all those members who arrived nine years ago yesterday, congratulations.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of all members of the House, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Burlington, Joyce Savoline, on her birthday today. Happy Birthday.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. It has to do with what is clearly an economic crisis bearing down on our province. The first quarter of this year saw Canada's economy shrink, primarily because of the difficulties this province is facing. The massive job losses we've seen in the auto industry just in the last few weeks tell us that the situation is escalating. As a first step towards what we believe should be happening in terms of the tabling of a mini-budget before we rise for the summer, are you prepared to direct your House leader to work with opposition House leaders to schedule an emergency debate on the state of the economy at the earliest opportunity?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It would seem to me that every question period, every opportunity we have with the media and during the course of various debates in this Legislature, we have an opportunity and indeed a respon-

ibility to talk about the economy. I'm pleased to engage in this right now.

One of the things I want Ontarians to understand is that there is a profound difference in terms of our approach when it comes to growing this economy and their approach. They believe that for every complex problem there's a neat and tidy solution. That is not the case when it comes to the economy. You cannot simply cut taxes and expect that that's going to generate economic growth. They didn't close that GM car plant in Mexico yesterday because of high corporate taxes. They didn't close it because they thought that the labour costs were too high. The world is a little more complex, and it's high time that my Conservative friends come to grips with it. You need to do more than just cut corporate taxes.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's regrettable that the Premier continues to use this kind of platform for political rhetoric and to attack the opposition parties rather than try to find some way of approaching this in a united and constructive way. He stands up here day after day and attacks the opposition for raising very legitimate concerns. His rhetoric is small comfort to the families in Windsor and Oshawa and elsewhere throughout this province who are losing their jobs under his watch and under his policies. What we're suggesting here today is an opportunity to discuss this, give everyone in this place an opportunity to have input, move forward, bring in new policies, new approaches. We want to work with you in a constructive way to address the real challenges of this province. Why won't you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: If that were so, then you would think that at the House leaders' meeting, which just concluded a few moments ago, the representative for the Conservative Party might have raised this very issue. That was not the case. Instead, they chose to do that within the context of a highly charged question period. I understand that's their right to do so, but I think it undermines their credibility in this particular regard.

1050

Here's the real issue, and we need to expose this to the light of day: They want to cut taxes in the province of Ontario by \$5 billion. That is not going to help businesses that are struggling today. They are not paying corporate taxes today because they are struggling—certain parts of the sector. Furthermore, they're not prepared to acknowledge that cutting \$5 billion out of our revenues means cuts to our schools, cuts to our hospitals, cuts to the programs that protect the most vulnerable, and cuts to protections for our environment. They're not prepared to acknowledge that. I am, and I won't go there.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This is another repeat performance, and a disappointing one, to say the least, especially for people who are losing jobs across this province and the communities and families who are being impacted by those job losses and plant closures.

The Premier tries to suggest that we're only approaching this from one perspective. My colleague from Oshawa, Mr. Ouellette, stood in this House yesterday and offered a number of positive alternatives to look at in

terms of addressing the ongoing and long-term challenges in the auto sector in Ontario. Once again, you showed utter disdain for proposals and real opportunities to move forward here in a co-operative way.

We're asking you once again to involve this assembly. Show that it means something to you, that the people in this place have a role to play. Let us have input, and based on that input, bring in a mini-budget and we'll address these problems going into the future in Ontario.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here's another fundamental difference between our government and the opposition: We believe that one of the most important things we can do in this period of our economic history—while we can't guarantee jobs for all Ontarians that will be there in perpetuity, what we can do is work as hard as we can to guarantee the employability of our people. That's why we've lent such a strong focus to education. That's why, in our recent budget, we committed \$1.5 billion to further enhancing training opportunities. That's why tomorrow, in fact, I'll be announcing some of the specific details about our second-career strategy.

We believe it's really important to help people who have lost their jobs to get long-term training opportunities, something that has not been available not just here in Ontario, but anywhere else in the country. They voted against that provision. Again, they would rather cut taxes and allow people to flounder on their own. We think we've got a responsibility to help and we will continue to do just that.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: As you can well imagine, families in Oshawa are devastated about how the closures are going to impact them. Workers are rightly out there demonstrating their displeasure with the agreements to try to make changes there. And it's not going to end there. I would let the members know that the internal documents I am in possession of talk about the St. Catharines powertrain plant and what's going to happen there.

Yesterday, Premier, the questioning was to try and find out the details of the funding agreements on the transfer of funds. It was supposedly based on employment. Is that employment based on internal employment or external employment? And how is it going to be in the plant or outside the plant? First, we heard it was a grant; then it was a loan; then it was a 50-year loan; then a 30-year loan; and then \$100 million and \$175 million. Premier, can you let us in on what the actual funding agreement is?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will allow the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to speak to some of the details to this.

Let me just say this at the outset, and I know the member opposite understands this: We have been working hard with a variety of auto manufacturers. They have demanded of us—and we think this is perfectly reasonable from their perspective—that we treat the individual

agreements with some commercial sensitivity. The folks at Toyota don't want their arrangement known to the folks at Ford, the folks at Ford don't want their arrangement known to the folks at GM, and then Honda as well. So we intend to respect that.

I can say, though—and this is the fundamental difference; I want to draw the line once again—that we believe it's important on the part of our government to sit down with CAW workers, auto workers and auto manufacturers in the province of Ontario, and to enter into a competition with the US to ensure that we land new investment. What we need to know on the part of the Conservatives is whether they continue to support our being in competition with the US, our working with the CAW and our working with our manufacturers to ensure that we land more new investment to create more new jobs for Ontario workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The General Motors truck plant closing is going to have a devastating effect on Oshawa, and in fact on all of the communities in Durham region. In addition to the workers who are going to be laid off, there's going to be a huge spin-off effect, which is going to relate to other businesses relating to the auto industry, as well as the hospitality industry. These are real people with families to feed and mortgages to pay.

But there is something that the Premier can do. There are going to be up to \$35 million in penalties that are to be paid by General Motors pursuant to your agreement with them. Will you commit today to directly reinvesting those funds back into our communities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think it's important to note that the Premier reported yesterday that coming very soon is taking that step with our new skills development program. When that party that is asking a question today was asked to vote whether they were interested in assisting people who need to be retrained for new jobs, that party in opposition was opposed to that and voted against it.

What is really important today is that the community of Oshawa—they are hurting today. We are worried about those families and we want those families working. This government will continue to do everything it can to help GM succeed. We know that these are challenging times for GM today. We know that we want more investment in the future. For these members today, I ask them, will they stand up for GM? Because we will have opportunities again with this company. We want to be there for GM and we're going to count on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is also to the Premier. Everyone in the region of Durham, in fact, those associated with the auto sector, know there's a serious challenge. There's a real challenge for you, Premier, a real opportunity for you, to show compassion and leadership. In fact, our opposition leader, Mr. Runciman, has

said today that we should have a discussion on this. It's such an important question. Let's not just politicize it. What I'm asking you to do today is, do you have a plan to bring together the CAW, Chris Buckley, as well as the president of General Motors in Canada, and provide a forum and some leadership to find a solution, not just for General Motors but for the families, the employees, and for the province of Ontario? Do you have a plan to bring them together to find a solution, or is this just going to be more political finger-pointing?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think we do have to be clear that today we are thinking about the families in Oshawa that are affected by the General Motors announcement. Our first concern is for the workers on the line at the truck plant in Oshawa. When we call Buzz Hargrove and say, "What can we do?" Buzz Hargrove tells us that we have to help land new investments.

So when these members opposite stand to ask the question of us, I ask the question of them, will you be there to support General Motors when they need help the most? When we want to support those families through our new retraining programs for workers who are being laid off, will you support those initiatives? Those will be key.

Let me say too that there are challenges and there are successes: yesterday's Ford announcement and yesterday's Honda announcement. We—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Yesterday's announcement that General Motors is permanently closing its truck plant in Oshawa is simply tragic. It's tragic because the workers there have won literally dozens of awards for productivity and for excellence. It's tragic because 2,600 of those workers are now being shown the street. It's tragic because the McGuinty government, with much boasting and chest-thumping, gave General Motors \$235 million without getting any job guarantees for the workers.

My question is this: Why did the McGuinty government let down thousands of Oshawa workers when you gave General Motors \$235 million and obviously didn't get any job guarantees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate the question. I think it's worth listening to what Buzz Hargrove had to say about this issue. He said:

"In contrast to the federal government's inaction, the Ontario government has been doing its best to support auto investment and employment... Without provincial support (including its participation in GM's Beacon project), the situation facing the industry today would be far, far worse."

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I can't tell from one day to the next where the NDP stands on this issue. They say they are in favour of supports for the auto sector, but when there is some kind

of setback, when they closed a plant in Mexico, two in the US and one in Ontario, they say we should never have offered assistance in the first place.

We are not backing away from making difficult decisions to find new opportunities to support the auto workers in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier is mistaken: It's the Premier who thinks you can give \$235 million to General Motors and you don't have to worry about job guarantees for workers. I say if you're going to give \$235 million to General Motors, you'd better get some job guarantees or it's a bad deal.

But it's not just that. The McGuinty government changes its story just about every day. When this deal was first announced, General Motors workers and other auto workers were told that it was going to guarantee their jobs across Ontario—thousands of jobs. What do we find now? No job guarantees. When it was first announced, we were told, "This is an investment. This is a grant." Now that it doesn't look so good, suddenly the Premier says, "Oh, it's only a loan."

Premier, here's the end question: Do you think it's a good deal that General Motors—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: GM itself has admitted that it may very well just have put itself in breach of the agreement which we entered into. They have specifically acknowledged that.

I understand from my good friend opposite that he believes that the only thing we need to do is cut corporate taxes. He needs to get in touch with the Mexican workers at the plant in Mexico and speak to them about that, because they think they've got the lowest corporate taxes on this side of the world. He also thinks that the issue here is labour costs, that the people at CAW are getting paid too much. Again, he needs to get in touch with the Mexican workers to find out about their position on that particular score.

The fact of the matter is, we have entered into a number of agreements. There were some job guarantees associated with that. There are going to be some financial consequences that will flow from that. We will not become reluctant to continue to compete on behalf of the auto worker in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier seems to spend a lot of time talking about what may or may not happen in Mexico. I think the Premier should get in touch with what's happening to workers here in Ontario who are losing their jobs by the thousands under the McGuinty government.

But I want to get an answer to the question. In my view, a deal that gives General Motors \$235 million of the people's money and then allows General Motors to lay off thousands of workers is a bad deal. My simple question: Does the Premier still think it was a good deal for workers at General Motors and Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: If I've got to make a choice, I'm with the Canadian Auto Workers, I'm with Buzz

Hargrove and I'm with the families who are supported by those jobs.

My friend the leader of the NDP might not like to acknowledge this, but the competition out there is pretty tough. There was a US southern state that came to the table in connection with a potential Kia investment and put down \$1 billion. At the end of the day, we cannot win if it comes down to money alone. Fortunately, we have quality and productivity on our side; we have public health care on our side; we have good infrastructure on our side; we have cultural, relentless innovation on our side; and we have, perhaps best of all, a government on the side of Canadian auto workers, their families and this industry in our province.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: The Premier wants to pretend that he's on the side of workers, but General Motors not only has taken advantage of the McGuinty government and \$235 million of public money, but they signed a collective agreement a couple of weeks ago saying they weren't going to do this. So if the Premier is on the side of the workers, what is the Premier going to do to force General Motors to live by the terms of the collective agreement they signed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP well understands that there is a very important relationship to be found between the two parties to this agreement. I know they are going to pursue some difficult conversations at this point in time. But rather than insinuate myself into that process, what I want both sides to know, what I've told Buzz Hargrove, what I've told CAW workers individually, what I've told the president of GM North America, what I've told the presidents of Ford and Daimler, with my visit to Fiat, with Honda and Toyota—I've told them all we are prepared to sit down and work as hard as we can to land new investment in the province of Ontario. Rather than insinuate myself into a difficult situation between the CAW and GM at this time, what Ontario taxpayers need to know is that we're going to find a way to bring both sides together to ensure there is a bright and promising future for the auto sector and auto sector jobs in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, the workers in Oshawa have heard all those words before and they know all too well how empty those words are. They know what they heard only three years ago, that giving General Motors \$235 million was going to guarantee their jobs and thousands of other GM jobs. It turns out that promise was completely false.

Premier, it comes down to this: General Motors has got \$235 million of the public's money; workers are out the door. General Motors made a commitment to the auto workers that they were going to sustain jobs. They made that commitment just two weeks ago. The auto workers want to know what you are going to do about both of those things, or don't you care, really, about their jobs, when it comes right down to it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's becoming more and more obvious to me that the leader of the NDP has not had real contact with any CAW workers of late, because when I've had that contact with them, one of the things they seek continual reassurance on is that we will continue to fight for the auto sector in Ontario, that we will continue to do everything we can to land new investment. Of course, we regret the fact that so many workers have lost jobs, but the fact of the matter is that we continue to do better than any other jurisdiction in North America.

Something that was overlooked yesterday was the announcement of a new product coming out of the Ford plant. Something that was overlooked yesterday was a new announcement for a Honda parts plant. Around the corner, we've got a new Toyota assembly plant that will begin work on a full-time basis. There is some room for some real optimism. I think the last thing we need to do right now is to somehow pull back and decide that we can't participate in these kinds of ventures, because what auto workers are looking for us to do is to show—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, what workers across this province want is a government that's actually prepared to stand up to GM, rather than simply doling out the money and watching them lay off workers.

I was in Oshawa just a week and a half ago. I was at a workers' action centre talking with workers who have already lost their jobs, who are looking at the prospect of losing their homes, who don't have another job to go to. They know that the 2,600 jobs that are going to go at the truck plant will mean another 10,000 jobs in terms of parts. They hear all your promises. They see all your photo ops. They see all your empty announcements. What they want to know is, when is the Premier of Ontario going to stand up to General Motors and start standing up for workers who are losing their jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The fact of the matter is, we are clawing back money from GM. There's no dispute in that regard, none whatsoever.

What I should tell my colleague, as a matter of interest, is that at the Ford announcement yesterday they launched a new product in Ontario and took on 500 new workers in that regard. There was a reporter—

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Mr. Howard Hampton: This would be the muscle car.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Now my colleague says that he's against the new product. That's why I said at the outset, it's hard to figure out from one day to the next, from one question to the next—is he suggesting that we should pull that product off the assembly line and put those workers out of work?

I want auto workers to know, there's only one party in this Legislature which is firmly in their corner. We'll do everything we need to do to make sure that we land new investment with this party and this government.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. Premier, a few weeks ago, I asked if your government would honour your agreement with forestry partners to provide for a long-term regulation under the Endangered Species Act which would recognize forest management plans. You indicated that your government was turning its back on forestry partners and your previous commitment and would not honour its word. Since then, the Ontario Forestry Industry Association has been working on a new stewardship agreement, and they have had a legal opinion that indicates the act would allow such an agreement.

My question is this: Will you agree to negotiate a stewardship agreement in the interests of ensuring that northern communities don't become an endangered species?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to be able to respond. First and foremost, we must take credit for having the Endangered Species Act, which is in fact the most significant act in North America for the protection of species at risk.

The Premier was very clear in his letter to the forest industry that we would in fact integrate the Endangered Species Act into the forest management plans. I have said that repeatedly. So what we're able to do—we have 46 of those plans, soon to be 47—is sit down with the industry over the next year and do exactly that. We've been working with the industry. It's not difficult. They have a good track record. They already deal with 21 of those endangered species, and we look to build on what has already been an excellent track record. So we find that this is consistent with the approach we've been taking, and I'm looking forward to working with the forest industry.

Mr. Norm Miller: I guess that's why the Ontario Forestry Coalition has made the trek down here from northern Ontario to have a press conference today. They are so happy with the way things are going.

More than 230,000 jobs are at stake here. We just can't afford to lose these jobs. This province has attained a world-renowned platinum standard for excellence in forestry, and we've seen the results. Case studies prove that our current forestry practices co-exist with efforts to support endangered species. We've seen increases in caribou, red-shouldered hawks and bald eagles, yet you continue to work against the industry instead of with it.

Northern communities, First Nations, and working people need your commitment, your word that you will try to reach a compromise instead of handing out ultimatums. Will you promise to continue discussions and work for an agreement?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Of course we'll continue discussions. I've already had them at the table a couple of times. I've encouraged them to come back to work with

us to develop the policy and the regulations as we work through how to deal with this.

We have wonderful companies such as Tembec that are more than pleased with the opportunity to have a year with which to continue to work—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're pleased?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: They are pleased, and are prepared to publicly say they are pleased—this is the owner and president of Tembec. They are prepared and willing to work with us and come to the table over the next year.

I don't see why this is difficult. What we're saying is, we want to protect species at risk. We have companies that are prepared to do that. We have standards that we know they can meet, and we've got a year within which to do it.

I think, in fact, the fearmongering that's going on is not justified. The best way to solve a problem is to sit down, talk it out and deal with it.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. This government's auto job strategy is in shambles. The sector is being driven into the ground by poor government decisions, and the minister knows it. It's not just the Big Three that are hurting. In the minister's hometown, we're seeing the trickle-down effect: 30 jobs at Falcon Tool and Die—gone; and another 30 jobs at Peterson Spring of Canada. How many more auto and auto-related jobs have to leave this province before this minister and her government admit that they have failed and their auto job strategy is wrong?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think it's important to note that our auto investment strategy has led companies to make investments for where cars and trucks, vehicles, are going to be in the next 20 years, allowing our companies to shift on a dime, changing with consumer changes. That really is the impetus of our funding to these companies.

We should use Ford Oakville as a very good example. Yesterday, they launched their new Flex. That is a new model that they could put in on a flex line made possible by the Ontario government and by support from the federal government. That is why we saw an ad for the hiring of 500 jobs at the Oakville plant. I'd like this member to stand up and say that that is a failure.

Mr. Paul Miller: This member would be glad to stand up. The minister talks and talks and talks, but there's no substance. I wonder if these are the same lines she's feeding the hard-working folks in Windsor. They deserve much better.

New Democrats have put forward numerous constructive proposals to stem the loss of jobs and to provide workers and their families a safety net when layoffs are unavoidable. This government, that minister, has rejected every one of them. Why is she turning her back on Ontarians and her own constituents?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think it's fair to say that every single member in this House should be concerned about any job loss that occurs in our sector, in particular a challenging sector like the automotive sector. Every one of us should worry about the workers in Windsor, the workers in Hamilton and any community that is suffering job loss.

But that's why this government brings forward the kinds of policies that we do, like the area of skills training, like the second-career program that we're going to hear more about in detail this very week. We expect every member of the House to support initiatives that can move workers who are losing jobs on one plant floor into a whole new career where there are jobs available. We want members of the House to support those workers.

We want to see support from the Conservatives and the NDP. Alas, every time they've had an opportunity to support these budgets that have these initiatives, they voted against those proposals. That's what the people of Windsor—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. This spring, we have seen how natural occurrences, such as flooding, can have the effect of devastating property and displacing people from their homes. Similarly, the fire season in Ontario also has the potential of causing great damage.

With a rapid transition from winter to summer-like conditions, it is important to be prepared. Would the minister tell us what plans and resources her ministry has put in place to deal with the potential wildfires this spring and summer?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to assure the member and the members of this House that we're well prepared for the fire season. As a matter of fact, this year we have just under 100 fires; it was about 350 this time last year. We have, without a doubt, within the MNR, one of the most world-renowned groups of people, who are constantly asked, as a matter of fact, to go out and share their expertise.

A good example of that was what happened during the flooding this year. The greatest strength that MNR has rests within the people it has. This year, we evacuated over 2,500 folks from Port Albany, Attawapiskat and Kashechewan. Now those folks are back home; the evacuees are back home. It gives me an opportunity to say thank you to Stratford, for example, a host community, but also to say thank you to the MNR folks for all of the work that they provided in ensuring that these people were safe during the flood season.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It is important to be prepared to deal with potential wildfires, but we should do our best to prevent them from starting in the first place. Fluctuating weather patterns and lightning account for approximately 50% of wildfires. However, obviously, human

activity is responsible for the other 50%. In other words, people are responsible for the fires.

This is an important issue for all Ontarians who live, work and play in rural areas. We should all be mindful of the potential hazards that could cause fires, particularly at this time of year. Can the minister elaborate on the types of things that people can do to prevent fires and protect their cottages and homes?

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Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: The member is correct: Prevention is the first and foremost way to go. But I need to assure everyone that we have 700 professionally trained firefighters at MNR and over 160 private crews that we can bring on when we need them. We need to know that they have put together strategies that enable people to work within their needs for wildfires.

For example, we have two that we've put out: the FireSmart home assessment test and the FireSmart owners manual. We've also extended our physical bases. We've put in over 700 new satellite phones to ensure that our crews are very safe, and we've also extended our contracts so that the crews are coming in earlier and they're staying later to deal with forest fires. But the most important thing we can do is just think, because prevention is first and foremost when it comes to forest fires in this province.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Transportation: Nauman Nusrat pleaded guilty to criminal negligence causing death by street racing. The death he caused was that of a 48-year-old husband and father, David Virgoe. His wife, Debbie, and two of his three children, son Brad and daughter Bobbi, were in court yesterday to hear that the man responsible for the death of their father and husband would serve two years less a day under house arrest and a lifetime driving ban. He can attend classes from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the week, he gets to go shopping for four hours on Saturday and do whatever he needs to do to practise his religion on Sunday.

After all the effort by this Legislature to put in place laws that are intended to carry serious consequences for the mindless and criminal act of street racing, does the minister agree that this sentence undermines his efforts and those of this Legislature to send a strong message that street racing will not be condoned in this province?

Hon. James J. Bradley: What I can say to the member is that, most certainly, all members of this House approved in this Legislature measures which are among the strongest you'll find in North America against street racing. I can say that it was our hope—I know it was your hope, it was the hope of members in the New Democratic Party and the hope of the government—that this would have a major deterrent effect on those who decided they were going to violate the laws of Ontario through street racing; that is, going 50 kilometres an hour or more over the limit and engaging in acts which endanger the public. That was the purpose of this legisla-

tion, and I think all of us were hopeful that that legislation would have an impact on all who saw that legislation and how it could be applied.

Mr. Frank Klees: We either believe that there should be serious consequences for those who take the lives of innocent people on our streets or we don't. We can continue to churn out legislation here, we can continue to make pronouncements regarding that legislation and we can continue to do our part as legislators to send that message, but if they're not supported by our justice system and if the consequences of that legislation are not supported by our judges and by the system, then we're wasting our time here.

I would ask this: Will the minister introduce legislation—if the courts are not prepared to do it—to supplement the legislation that we have passed here with minimum sentencing so that those consequences will in fact be realized by the people who are breaking the law and taking the lives of innocent people on our roads and highways?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will allow the Attorney General to answer the second portion of the question.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As the member opposite should know, the charge was prosecuted under the Criminal Code, which is federal legislation. Crown attorneys throughout the province take such acts very seriously and prosecute them to the full extent of the law, reflecting the will of this Legislature and the Parliament of Canada. The crown in this particular case asked for a sentence more stringent and different than the trial judge imposed.

The trial judge is an independent officer who makes an independent decision. This case is now within the appeal period. We're awaiting the report of the trial crown, and we will take a look at whether that trial report and the law support an appeal, but we will take these very seriously, as we did here and we do in all cases. We will continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. The member from Parkdale–High Park.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Housing. Mr. Speaker, your report from Statistics Canada indicates that there is a housing affordability crisis in Toronto. Toronto residents now spend more of their income on housing than any other place in Canada. There are 70,000 households in Toronto waiting for affordable housing, yet today we read that over 1,400 affordable housing units sit empty in Toronto because of lack of funding support from the Ontario government for repairs. Minister, what action will your government take to address this unacceptable waste of housing resources?

Hon. Jim Watson: I too read the article, and I am obviously concerned when I see several housing units and apartments—upwards of perhaps 1,400—that are not inhabitable. It was one of the reasons the Premier announced a \$100-million renovation and rehabilitation

fund, for the simple reason that we recognize that the aging housing stock has caused difficulties with Toronto housing, with Ottawa housing, with housing providers across the province.

Toronto's share of that money is \$36.5 million, and we're proud to partner with the city of Toronto. We ask them to ensure that that money goes to good use to ensure that those units that are uninhabitable now get fixed up so that families can move in.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Housing doesn't, of course, admit that not one new dollar in the budget was allocated for social housing new bills, and the \$100 million that was allocated is for all of Ontario. Save Our Structures has demanded \$300 million for Toronto alone.

So I'm going to ask again: When will this government stop the rhetoric and take serious action to reduce and eliminate the growing list of over 120,000 households waiting for affordable housing in this province?

Hon. Jim Watson: It's interesting that the member referenced Save Our Structures, because in the last election the leader of the NDP brought forward a platform and promised \$30 million to repair the backlog of social housing. What did the McGuinty government deliver? Thirty-six million dollars to Toronto.

The second point is that the money is new. It was a new announcement, new dollars flowing to the municipal sector, and when we did announce \$100 million for housing, what did the NDP housing critic call it? A "meagre" \$100 million.

Maybe in the circles that that member travels, \$100 million is meagre, but in my circles that's a lot of money. It's a record amount of money in housing rehabilitation. We're proud of the record. We call on the federal government to come to the table when their funding expires on March 31 of next year.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday, in my own riding of Oakville, I attended an event to kick off Roadcheck 2008. I spent a few hours at the truck inspection station on the QEW, working with some extremely professional men and women from MTO. They were looking at brakes, tires, steering, frames—all the parts of a truck that should be inspected on a regular basis—all enabling them to ensure the safety of the travelling public on our highways.

I understand this is the 21st year of Roadcheck. It's the 20th year that Ontario has been a participant. I'm hoping the minister will share with this House the reason why the province participates in this year after year.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to thank the member for asking an excellent question. Roadcheck, as you would know, is an international, annual three-day truck and motor coach safety blitz involving Canada, the US and Mexico.

It allows us to monitor the effectiveness of ministry enforcement programs, increase awareness of commer-

cial vehicle safety issues and remove unsafe vehicles from the highways. Ministry enforcement officers inspect the mechanical condition of the vehicles, driver qualifications and daily logs. Ontario inspects more vehicles than any other Canadian province and most US states. Ontario's 82% compliance rate in 2007 continues the trend of improvements since 1995, when only 57% of the vehicles inspected were deemed to be mechanically fit.

Today is the second day of Roadcheck 2008. I look forward to receiving those results when they are complete. They will assist us in any changes we have to make in terms of enforcement, regulation or legislation.

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Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm sure we're all pleased to hear that Ontario is still a leader in the Roadcheck safety blitz. Obviously, we'd all encourage that to continue.

The minister mentioned an 81.9% compliance rate in 2007. That's an increase from a rate of only 57% compliance in 1995. That's a significant improvement. But I've also heard of blitzes where there have been much higher rates of non-compliance. That's a concern for my constituents and for all Ontarians who share the roads with commercial vehicles. I'm hoping that the Minister of Transportation can please explain to the House some of the findings of the more significant rates of non-compliance.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Ontario, as the member would know, is a leader in truck safety standards and enforcement. Each year, 140,000 commercial driver and vehicle inspections are conducted by MTO's team of highly trained enforcement officers. We will see varying compliance rates resulting from these blitzes, because there are different types of safety blitzes that take place throughout the province each year.

For example, Roadcheck 2008 has a random blitz, where MTO enforcement officers will pull over a random selection of commercial vehicles to inspect. The second type of safety blitz, as seen recently in York region, is a targeted blitz, where enforcement officers use their skills to identify vehicles they feel are of a safety concern. It is only these vehicles that are pulled over to be inspected, possibly leading to a higher non-compliance rate.

Ontario is a major transportation corridor for commercial vehicles and we will continue to conduct safety blitzes and raise the awareness of commercial vehicle—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION EDUCATION FUNDING

M. Peter Shurman: J'ai une question pour la ministre des Affaires francophones. Il me semble que chaque fois que la ministre parle dans cette Chambre, elle est très claire et forte au sujet de la promotion de la langue française. Alors, c'était une surprise pour beaucoup

d'Ontariens de découvrir que l'argent fédéral désigné spécifiquement pour cet effort serait éliminé pour les écoles privées, excepté plusieurs écoles secondaires. Est-ce que la ministre peut confirmer à la Législature qu'elle va maintenant renoncer à sa position forte concernant la langue française, ou est-ce qu'elle peut nous informer d'une nouvelle politique du gouvernement McGuinty créée pour détruire complètement ces écoles privées par n'importe quel moyen ?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'll ask the Minister of Education to answer that question.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Merci beaucoup, mais je dois répondre en anglais; pardonnez-moi.

The issue is that this money for French-language education has been administered by the federal government up until now, and it has now been given to us to administer. The reality is that we believe that it is irresponsible of us to allocate money to schools that we do not inspect, over which we have no control, so the money is only going to schools in the private sector that we inspect. So in fact, there are secondary schools that will receive funding, because we do inspect those schools, but private schools that we do not inspect will not receive this funding.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I too will switch to English, because I think all members should get the full brunt of this. Perhaps the minister can confirm that the McGuinty government considers private schools to now be second-class following last fall's election. It's true that Ontarians voted not to fund private schools, but they did not vote to abandon them, either. And they did not vote, nor can they vote, to eliminate federal funds earmarked to teach Ontario's children the French language. This is money directly from Ottawa.

Can the minister assure this House that she will call for a review immediately with a view to reinstating the former policy of funding the teaching of French to each and every pupil in Ontario, so long as Ottawa provides the funds to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On this side of the House, it is our intention to build the most vibrant publicly funded education system in the world. As a part of that, it is our responsibility to make sure that money that flows to the private system, if it is administered by our government, flows to schools where there is some possibility for accountability. In the private schools that we inspect, that issue Ontario secondary school diplomas and credits in our secondary system, then we flow the money to those schools. But where there is no accountability mechanism, then it would be irresponsible of us to flow that money. Our goal is to have the publicly funded education system the system of first choice for every family in this province.

YOUTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Where is the minister's plan, and what is her timetable for a full public

consultation with youth regarding changes she proposes for the Child and Family Services Act, as well as the Ontario youth justice system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to tell you that the member opposite raises a very important issue, and that is the issue of consultation with youth. I have personally spent a considerable amount of my time talking to young people, particularly people who are involved with our child welfare system, about the changes they would like to see in our child welfare system. I am a passionate advocate of youth engagement, and I can assure the member opposite that as we proceed with any changes dealing with youth we will, of course, have a full engagement with them.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think everybody in this House knows that this minister has got a very poor record when it comes to public consultation generally, particularly on the poverty file.

But nonetheless, I would actually like to know from the minister some specifics. Exactly how much time is the minister allotting for consultations with youth over changes which are going to markedly affect them, when will notices about these meetings take place, and how long is going to be provided for the full consultation that the minister plans?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can tell the member opposite is that we are committed to transforming the youth justice system to reduce the chances that youth who are in conflict with the law will reoffend. That has two big advantages: It makes our communities safer and it enables young people to move on and be productive, contributing members of our society.

Of course, I cannot speak to proposals that are not yet before this Legislature, but I can say that we are committed to helping our youth achieve their full potential. That is the objective in every initiative we take, be it poverty reduction, be it working with children in our care, be it youth in the justice system. We're also working very hard to prevent youth from becoming involved with the youth justice system, and our youth opportunity strategy, among other initiatives, is very much focused on that objective.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Shortly after the election of 2003, our government made several moves to begin repairing what had been a very fractious relationship between the preceding provincial government and municipalities in Ontario. As a two-term municipal councillor in the city of Thunder Bay, I had direct, first-hand experience with that particular style of government. One of the first things we did to begin repairing that relationship was agree to a request from AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to which most organized municipalities in the province belong, to review the provincial land tax system for unorganized municipalities or unorganized areas in the province.

Minister, my constituents in Thunder Bay–Atikokan do not feel that they have had an appropriate ability to convey to our government and your ministry the unique circumstances that many people in northwestern Ontario find themselves in when it comes to PLT reform. Can you confirm if a consultation on PLT will be held in Thunder Bay, and if so, when?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First, allow me to congratulate the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, who has been a strong advocate for his community on this issue.

The member will know that in the fall of 2004 we conducted a number of consultations throughout northern Ontario. We met with more than 350 individuals in places like Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Fort Frances, Kenora, Dryden, North Bay and Thunder Bay.

But to the member's specific question, yes, we will do another round of consultations, thanks to your advocacy on that. We will indeed be in Thunder Bay to do that. We will focus on PLT rates, phase-in and new services. I look forward to the member's continuing input on the issue.

1140

Mr. Bill Mauro: There is a significant misconception when it comes to tax rates of people living in unorganized territory within Thunder Bay–Atikokan and other unorganized areas within the province. Many of these people already pay a roads boards tax and/or an education tax. Furthermore, many of those who will be affected by PLT reform are seasonal residents who live full-time within organized municipalities and pay a full-time residential property tax for the services the municipalities provide. They receive, in most circumstances, very limited services for properties that in many cases are 30, 60 or 80 miles away from the nearest organized municipality.

I've been speaking publicly for close to two years on this issue, to at least 1,000 people who share my very serious concern on how PLT reform may affect the affordability of these residences. Minister, can you advise me and my constituents of Thunder Bay–Atikokan about how you envision PLT reform being rolled out and the impact on affordability it is likely to have?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member raises very valid concerns. PLT reform is about fairness, so that similar properties will pay similar taxes. We're attempting here to further modernize a property tax system that has not been updated since the 1940s. We hope to create one fair and consistent property assessment system across the province.

Again, in part due to the member's efforts, any tax changes will be phased in. There have been no final decisions made. That's why we're doing this round of consultations: to get that input. I would like to congratulate the member again on the outstanding contribution he has made in defending the interests of his constituents to ensure that they have fair representation in this process and that their legitimate concerns are taken into account.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'll direct my question to the Premier in the absence of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We don't talk about absences.

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Minister, as you know, there is talk in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk about the \$25-million relationship fund set up by your government to encourage greater coordination amongst government and aboriginal communities. In the Brantford courtroom on Friday were Marlys Edwardh, a high-profile Toronto lawyer who has been hired by HDI, and also their lawyer, Aaron Detlor. Minister, are some of the monies from this \$25-million relationship fund budgeted to help pay for Toronto lawyers to fight local construction companies and home builders and to fight the city of Brantford?

Hon. Michael Bryant: No.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Minister. Further to this, taxpayers in Haldimand–Norfolk would like to know where the money in this relationship fund will be going. I didn't hear that in your answer. Home builders like Mike Corrado in Cayuga, for example, are keen to know if the province will establish a relationship fund for them as well. They have tremendous legal fees and have been the victims of extortion. Minister, is there a plan in place to help compensate home builders like Mike Corrado?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member's question. I think it's very important that the member raises the new relationship fund, because it is in fact an opportunity to allow for the playing field to be levelled, to allow for greater economic development, to allow for the acceleration of land claims that require action from the federal government, so that First Nations and Metis leadership are in the position where we can move through these claims in particular, and these potential economic development projects, that much more quickly. What that will mean, of course, is less of the kind of activity that gave rise to what the member refers to. The root cause of this is a federal government policy of hesitation over acceleration. We call for the federal government to do so, and I am confident that the federal government is certainly listening. We're looking forward to some action.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. You'll know that mayors from across northern Ontario are coming here to Queen's Park today in protest of what's happening in the forestry industry generally, but specifically, how this new process that you've created under the Endangered Species Act will make them duplicate a process that they're already doing under the forest management plans that they have to do under the forest management act.

My question to you is simply this: What are you prepared to do as the Premier in order to make sure that you accept a premise that the work that's done within the forest management plans be the way that we basically protect endangered species, rather than having to duplicate a process and add costs to an industry that is already hurting?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm delighted to be able to respond, but I find it a fascinating question from the member for Timmins–James Bay, since he voted against the legislation for endangered species. Fascinating—suddenly he's become a strong advocate.

I have indicated quite clearly that the Premier's message to the forestry industry stated that we will integrate into the forest management plans the new Endangered Species Act, and we have a year with which to do it. We have asked them to come and sit with us. After we go through the Environmental Bill of Rights, we listen to everyone who has an opportunity to speak and state their case. Once that is done and the decision is made, certainly we will ask them to come to the table and work with us as we develop the plans in terms of integrating into the forest management plans.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, I don't know what's happening in your ministry if they haven't already briefed you, but let me explain to you. When you have the forest management plan, there are forest planning manuals that you have to follow to develop the plan. The plan engages in making sure that we plan when it comes to cutting trees, that we take into consideration the habitat and the species which we'll be encountering when we go into the process of harvesting.

Those manuals, if you stacked them up on this desk today, would be somewhere around this high. What you're doing is forcing the industry to duplicate the process. What you're basically doing is saying that you're going to have to apply for permits above and beyond what we already have in the forest management plan.

The reason I voted against the legislation was that you never accepted our amendment that would have incorporated the good work that's been done under the sustainable forestry development act that could have been tied into this legislation. So I say again, will you accept the premise that the work done on the forest management plan be the work that makes sure that we're compliant with the Endangered Species Act?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: The member makes a great many assumptions. We have a whole year to sit down and work with the forestry industry in the forest management plans. We will do that. It's a commitment we have made. We will follow through with that commitment. I don't think there should be some huge assumptions made about what that might look like because, in fact, those decisions haven't been made. The commitment is that we can build on the standards there. They're superb standards with companies, as I indicated, such as Tembec, who have been working with the forest-

dwelling woodland caribou, and we will continue to do that to ensure that we have the highest standards when it comes to our endangered species within the forest industry.

And we have the commitment of the industry—not all of them, at this point—to work with us. They will certainly be invited to the table as we find solutions.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank John Lawrence of Wasaga Beach for sending this petition to me.

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

“Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

“Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of the city of Greater Sudbury.

“Whereas in Ontario there is no minimum standard of daily nursing and personal care for seniors living in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas Ontario seniors in long-term care are given only \$5.57 per day for meals;

“Whereas our personal support workers, the front-line staff in long-term-care homes, are stretched to the limit trying to meet residents' basic needs;

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals have broken their promises to increase overall per-resident funding by \$6,000, to bring in a minimum of care for seniors, to hire an ombudsman to make long-term care fairer and more transparent, and to hire 2,000 new long-term-care workers, including 600 nurses; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty rewarded himself with a \$40,000 pay raise;

“I petition the Ontario government to immediately fulfill the McGuinty Liberal promises for seniors.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Murray.

1150

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in this Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer recognizes the principles on which our province was founded and developed; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I will affix my signature to that.

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I am pleased to present a petition from 10-year-old Elyse Heubner. She came personally to Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently it is not a provincial offence to cause distress to an animal and places like puppy mills are dreadful and cruel, and all animals should be treated with love and kindness;

"We want the Ontario government to update the law so this madness will stop;

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

"It is essential to pass Bill 50 as soon as possible to help protect animals and punish anyone who is cruel to animals."

I have about 500 signatures, and I'm pleased to support Elyse and her friends.

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Sudbury.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act does not protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe"—a member of my riding—"and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered

or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

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

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Alie.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the growing number of unlawful firearms in motor vehicles is threatening innocent citizens and our police officers;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and being found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and affix my signature, and I ask Aaron to carry it for me.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the members of SEIU and the residents of Peterborough.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

“Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

“Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;

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

“We call on the government of Ontario:

“(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

“(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients’ needs.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Chris.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas crack houses, brothels and other persistent problem properties undermine a neighbourhood by generating public disorder, fear and insecurity; and

“Whereas current solutions—enforcement measures based on current criminal, civil and bylaws—are slow, expensive, cumbersome and not always successful; and

“Whereas safer communities and neighbourhoods (SCAN) legislation is provincial, civil law which counters the negative impact on neighbourhoods of entrenched drug, prostitution or illegal liquor sales based out of homes and businesses and is being successfully utilized in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and the Yukon; and

“Whereas the following have endorsed SCAN legislation: city of Ottawa, city of Kingston, city of Hamilton, federation of Ontario municipalities, Ottawa Police Service, Ottawa Police Services Board, Ottawa Centre MPP Yasir Naqvi, Ottawa Neighbourhood Watch executive committee, Concerned Citizens for Safer Neighbourhoods, Eastern Ontario Landlord Organization, Friends and Tenants of Ottawa Community Housing, Hintonburg Community Association, Somerset Street Chinatown BIA, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and the Dalhousie Community Association;

“Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, urge the province of Ontario to enact safer communities and neighbourhood (SCAN) legislation in Ontario for the benefit of our neighbourhoods and communities.”

I support this petition and affix my signature and send it your way by way of page Doaa.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of London and Waterloo.

“Whereas understaffing in Ontario’s nursing homes is a serious problem resulting in inadequate care for residents and unsafe conditions for staff;

“Whereas after the Harris government removed the regulations providing minimum care levels in 1995, hours of care dropped below the previous 2.25 hour/day minimum;

“Whereas the recent improvements in hours of care are not adequate, vary widely and are not held to accountable standards;

“Whereas there is currently nothing in legislation to protect residents and staff from renewed cuts to care levels by future governments; and

“Whereas care needs have measurably increased with aging and the movement of people with more complex health needs from hospitals into long-term-care homes;”

They petition the assembly to:

“Immediately enact and fund an average care standard of 3.5 hours per resident per day in the regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Dina.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System’s deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

“Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a \$20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government...; and

“Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

“Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

“That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I affix my signature to this and pass it to Chris.

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here from the people of Eglinton–Lawrence in support of stronger protection for our animals in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I fully support this and I give the petition to page Ellen.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative, intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre, located in western Mississauga, to serve the Mississauga-Halton area, and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and to support this petition and to ask page Christopher to carry it for me.

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have more petitions here in support of stronger protection for animal welfare in Ontario. These people live in the Forest Hill area of Toronto and here's their petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I fully support this petition and I hand this petition over to Alie, who is from Timmins–James Bay, a fine page from that wonderful part of our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for petitions has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 o'clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1204 to 1500.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FORMER
PARLIAMENTARIANS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just wanted to remind the members that there are a number of former parliamentarians visiting today. It's the annual general meeting of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. There's going to be a reception later this afternoon, and I know the former members would love to meet you.

As well, we're going to be planting a tree on the grounds at 4 o'clock this afternoon in memory of former MPPs who have passed away in the past year. If any of you are interested, 4 p.m. on the front grounds.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CLOTHING ALLOWANCES

Mrs. Julia Munro: This government has made a lot of announcements about how its child benefit will benefit Ontario's children. What it fails to point out is that at the same time it is bringing in the benefit, it is abolishing the back-to-school and winter clothing allowance for chil-

dren. The McGuinty government is giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

On May 15, York region council asked you to reinstate the clothing allowance for 2008. Thousands of families in Ontario depend on this payment, and they may not be able to put away money every month to make up for the cut to the allowance. In August and November, families would have received \$245 per child for the two clothing allowances. By starting your program in July and cutting the clothing allowance, you will force families to save both payments from half a year's worth of benefits.

In 2007, families in York region received \$591,000 to help pay for clothes for their children. The McGuinty Liberal government is cutting them off. You claim to care about poverty, so why are you axing this payment?

MEN'S HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to bring to the attention of the House a very important issue. Recently, the region of Durham council proclaimed next week, June 9 to 15, Men's Health Awareness Week. In making this week, the region reminds us in their proclamation that "it is important for all males, regardless of age, to become more informed about issues impacting their health, and to take a more responsible attitude toward their health and well-being."

As New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson once wisely said, "Recognizing and preventing men's health problems is not just a man's issue. Because of its impact on wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, men's health is truly a family issue."

Men's Health Awareness Week is an international event involving many countries that promotes men's health and encourages men of all ages to seek regular medical advice. It increases awareness of the importance of early detection and treatment of diseases such as prostate cancer, which the McGuinty government will be funding as of January 1, 2009.

I would like to acknowledge the region of Durham council and Chair Anderson for taking a leadership role in promoting men's health. In particular, I'd like to thank a constituent of mine, Jim Duncan, whose energy and dedication to men's health awareness is an inspiration.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The McGuinty Liberals and their so-called rural representative have once again rejected rural Ontario. Despite repeated requests by stakeholders and the PC caucus to hold public hearings on the pesticide bill outside of Toronto, and especially in rural Ontario, the McGuinty Liberals are shutting out democracy by holding public hearings only in Toronto. The McGuinty Liberals have said no to fairness for rural Ontario, and people in cities like Kingston, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Sarnia.

On May 26, the Liberal member from Huron-Bruce said, "I look forward to the hearings, and they should come to rural Ontario, where they will be very graciously received by the McGuinty government." Instead, her McGuinty colleagues have flat out rejected rural Ontario and her request for even one single hearing on the pesticide bill in rural Ontario. This is despite the fact that rural municipalities have shown leadership on this front for years. The parliamentary assistant for the environment said that he has faith in the agriculture sector. I say, then why are you shutting them out?

Where is the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs? She knows that hearings in Toronto won't allow many stakeholders from the forestry and agriculture sectors to have a say, especially at this busy time of year.

This is a three-page bill that affects every township, municipality and city in this province, but the McGuinty government isn't willing to talk to anyone outside the walls of Queen's Park. The Liberals are shutting out democracy and throwing in the towel for rural Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This week a memorandum of understanding was signed between the provinces of Ontario and Quebec to develop a cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gas emissions. It got an awful lot of coverage, far beyond its potential to actually deal with the problem.

Climate change is not like acid rain; it's not like phosphates; it's not like other pollution issues. It's a profound threat to the stability of our society and the future of our children. The scale of the looming crisis is at least as great as that of the Second World War. Charles Caccia, former Liberal MP, said it was a threat exceeded only by that of nuclear war.

Yet this province has no climate plan, no substantial allocation of funds for climate action and no commitment to building a new energy economy that would move us away from fossil fuels to a sustainable future. Both the United Nations and Lord Stern, in his report to the government of the UK, said that we needed to act fast, dramatically, within the next 10 years.

An absence of substantial action in the face of this dramatic threat is morally bankrupt, and on the issue of climate change, this government is morally bankrupt.

RIDEAU CANAL FESTIVAL

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: As Ontario celebrates National Tourism Week, I am pleased to be able to share with the members of this Legislature the wonderful activities taking place in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Last month, I had the pleasure of attending the launch of the Rideau Canal Festival at the Bytown Museum, along with our hometown Minister of Community and Social Services. Our government, through Celebrate Ontario 2008, is proud to contribute \$300,000 as a partner in this important inaugural festival.

The Rideau Canal, built 175 years ago, is a unique tourism destination in Ontario, and this festival not only celebrates the importance of the Rideau Canal to our city but also to the world, as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, heritage site.

Taking place in August, the Rideau Canal Festival is committed to being the first zero-footprint festival ever staged in Canada, with special initiatives designed to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced during the festival to zero. I congratulate Michel Gauthier, president and CEO, and Henry Storgaard, chairman, along with all of the volunteers, for their hard work and dedication to ensuring that this historic national landmark does not go unnoticed.

I encourage all members of my community, this Legislature and beyond to visit Ottawa this summer and enjoy the wonderful activities taking place.

ALDERSHOT

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to recognize the 50th anniversary of the beautiful community of Aldershot. Named after an English borough in Hampshire, Aldershot is a product of the unprecedented changes that happened in our towns and cities after World War II, a transportation hub steeped in natural beauty with a proud history of hosting nation builders.

Recently repatriated into the Burlington riding, I am pleased to be able to welcome back the citizens who are the lifeblood of this vibrant village, who have chosen to build their lives in Aldershot. I encourage all of our members to take the time out of their busy schedules and visit this very unique part of our province.

Home to the Royal Botanical Gardens, LaSalle Park and its wonderful marina, sports fields, trails, picnic areas and abounding natural heritage, and bordering Hamilton, Aldershot is the jewel of Burlington's western front, successfully maintaining its unique character throughout many boundary transitions.

I want to congratulate the residents and also the businesses of Aldershot on the occasion of their 50th anniversary, and I continue to wish them a prosperous and peaceful future.

1510

ADVANCED CORONARY TREATMENT FOUNDATION OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Leal: On May 30, I had the opportunity to attend the launch of the advanced coronary treatment program in Peterborough at Adam Scott secondary school. More than 4,300 grade 9 students from 23 high schools from both of the school boards in my riding will now be empowered to save lives. This is a significant contribution to safety in my community and beyond. Sixty physical education teachers have been trained as CPR instructors to train the students. The students will

then take their life-saving skills to their current and future families and to the local community.

Eight in 10 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur at home. Research indicates that citizen CPR response can improve survival rates by almost fourfold. Empowering youth with CPR training as part of their high school education will increase citizen CPR response rates and save lives over the long term.

The ACT Foundation's goal is to expand the CPR program to every high school throughout Ontario. To help make this possible, ACT has secured a provincial commitment of \$650,000 from the government of Ontario. The foundation has already established CPR programs in over 1,200 high schools across Canada, and over 900,000 youths have been trained.

The foundation and its core partners are winners of Imagine Canada's New Spirit of Community Partnership Award. I want to offer my congratulations to the creators of the ACT program.

ELDER ABUSE

Mr. Bill Mauro: June is Seniors' Month, and I want to highlight Ontario's strategy to combat elder abuse, which is the first of its kind in Canada.

Elder abuse is often defined as any act or omission that harms a senior or jeopardizes his or her health or welfare. Elder abuse can take place in the home, in other residential settings, or in the community.

The Ontario Seniors' Secretariat developed Ontario's strategy to combat elder abuse and is partnering with the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. Elder abuse regional consultants are in place province-wide to help promote and support efforts in addressing and preventing elder abuse. There are 55 elder abuse committees in Ontario, with eight in northwestern Ontario.

Overall, the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, through the leadership of the minister responsible for seniors, the Honourable Aileen Carroll, has invested \$1.6 million in Ontario's strategy to combat elder abuse. In May 2008, another \$209,000 was given to the Ontario Network for local groups such as the Community Elder Abuse Prevention Committee, run through the Lakehead Social Planning Council, in Thunder Bay.

The elder abuse regional consultant in northwestern Ontario is Ms. Lee Stones. Ms. Stones is coordinating the Thunder Bay elder abuse committee. Seniors who need immediate assistance can also telephone 211, which is staffed 24/7.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is on June 15 this year. In Thunder Bay, the event will be observed at the Intercity mall on June 14 from 10 to 4.

Ontario's seniors deserve to live safely and with dignity. I am proud to acknowledge that our provincial government is a Canadian leader on the elder abuse initiative.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. David Orazietti: I'm continually amazed by the incompetence of the official opposition.

On Monday, the Conservatives put out a release calling on me to stop the possible closure of several aging schools in Sault Ste. Marie. The member from Burlington and her party showed they are just as out of touch with my riding as they are with the rest of Ontario. If the Conservatives had done their homework, they'd know that the McGuinty government is providing \$44.8 million to replace these schools, something their government refused to do over eight years.

Here's what Algoma District School Board chair Wanda McQueen had to say in response to the Tory motion on rural schools: Parents "want the process sped up; they don't want it slowed down (and) they certainly don't want a moratorium."

Here's what Mario Turco, the director of education, said: "Parents in this community would be against us closing schools if they didn't have something to look forward to, like a brand new school."

Students in the Soo have benefited from a 37% increase in funding, in sharp contrast to the unrest, chaos and mismanagement prevalent during their time in office. They closed 506 public schools, cut \$1 billion out of education, and students lost 26 million learning days. Ontarians know the Conservatives have absolutely no interest in supporting public education.

Yesterday, in another release sent to my riding, the Conservatives said that I skipped the vote. The fact is, I was right here and voted on the motion, unlike their own members. Only 14 of 26 Conservative members showed up to vote on their own motion.

Get a leader in the Legislature, get organized, and get your facts straight.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOWING INDUSTRY ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 SUR L'INDUSTRIE DU REMORQUAGE

Mr. Zimmer moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act to regulate the motor vehicle towing industry in Ontario / Projet de loi 87, Loi réglementant l'industrie du remorquage de véhicules automobiles en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. David Zimmer: The bill provides for the self-regulation of the towing industry in Ontario in the public interest. The Towing Industry Council of Ontario is established. The council, which is managed by a board of

directors, is made up of operators of towing businesses and tow truck drivers who must register with the council in order to carry on a towing business or operate a tow truck. At least 40% of directors are appointed from outside the industry to ensure that the public interest is represented.

The activities of the council are funded through fees established by bylaw of the board and paid by registered persons and applicants for registration.

A complaints and discipline procedure is provided to ensure that registered persons are held accountable for the way in which they provide towing services. Registrations may be suspended or revoked, if necessary.

The board of the council is provided with regulation-making powers that are subject to the approval of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mr. David Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. We know there's an appropriate time for guests, and we welcome all of our guests to the chamber today.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SENIORS' MONTH

MOIS DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm pleased to rise before this House today to recognize June as Seniors' Month. For the 24th year, this House has recognized June as a time to celebrate the contributions that seniors have made and continue to make to their families, to their communities and to the province. This year our Seniors' Month theme is "Discover the Possibilities," and it was my pleasure to launch this special month in the Niagara-on-the-Lake public library, surfing the Web.

Le thème du Mois des personnes âgées de cette année est Explorez les possibilités, et j'ai eu le grand plaisir de lancer ce mois spécial à la bibliothèque publique de Niagara-on-the-Lake en naviguant sur Internet.

At the Niagara library, we were connected to people in Addington Highlands, Gravenhurst, Leamington, Montague, Powassan and Wasaga Beach via the Internet. We were joined by these communities to launch seven new locations to our Collaborative Seniors Portal Network at seniorsinfo.ca. This network of 29 Ontario communities provides easy one-stop access to information about programs and services offered to seniors by all orders of government and local community organizations. It's an award-winning example of all three orders of government working in a collaborative way for Ontario's seniors.

Ce réseau est un très bel exemple de la collaboration des trois paliers de gouvernement visant les personnes âgées de l'Ontario.

There are 1.6 million seniors in Ontario today and that number is expected to double to 3.2 million in the next 20 years. At the same time, more of our seniors are leading healthy, active, independent lives, discovering those possibilities every day.

The McGuinty government is committed to encouraging active and healthy aging and we do so through initiatives like seniorsinfo.ca and our seniors information fairs that are organized through our partners, the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario et la Fédération des aînés et des retraités francophones de l'Ontario.

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We are committed to helping seniors keep their independence for as long as possible. That is why we've invested \$700 million in our aging-at-home strategy, to match the needs of local seniors with appropriate support services. That is why in our 2008 budget we introduced a new \$1-billion seniors' property tax grant to help low- and moderate-income senior homeowners stay in their homes.

The McGuinty government believes in honouring the service and sacrifice of Ontario veterans. Our Veteran Appreciation Days, a partnership with the Dominion Institute, recognizes the contributions of our veterans in 10 communities this year.

Le gouvernement McGuinty croit qu'il est important de rendre hommage aux services qu'ont rendus les anciens combattants de l'Ontario et à leurs sacrifices. Cette année, nos journées d'appréciation des anciens combattants, en partenariat avec l'Institut du Dominion, reconnaissent les contributions de nos anciens combattants dans 10 collectivités de l'Ontario.

Our government is also committed to keeping our seniors safe. That's why we've invested \$2.77 million over the past three years to combat elder abuse. On June 15, Ontario will be joining the rest of Canada—and the rest of the world—in marking World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Every day of every month, our government is committed to helping seniors live the best possible life they can. We celebrate seniors in many ways, but especially in June, when we shine the spotlight on our seniors to celebrate their contributions.

I am pleased that communities across the province will be hosting award ceremonies, information fairs, seminars and social events to honour Ontario's seniors, a group that all of you will soon, or not too far away, be joining. That is our way of saying thank you for helping to build a strong Ontario.

Je suis heureuse que les collectivités de toute la province organisent des cérémonies de remise de prix, des foires d'information, des séminaires et des activités sociales pour rendre hommage aux personnes âgées de l'Ontario. C'est notre façon de vous remercier de nous aider à bâtir une province solide.

I encourage all of my colleagues in this House and Ontarians everywhere to go out into their communities and join in the celebration.

TOURISM WEEK

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Ontario is celebrating National Tourism Week, which started on Monday and runs through to June 8. The theme this year is "Potential Worth Exploring." This is exactly what we are doing to build a brighter future for our tourism industry. After all, tourism is a major economic driver and community builder across Ontario. It's a \$22.8-billion industry that supports more than 300,000 jobs. It's the largest seasonal employer of youth in our province.

While we have a lot of potential worth exploring, we also have some great success stories. We have an internationally acclaimed wine and culinary tourism sector that is getting better and better every year. Last year, we got our first UNESCO world heritage site, our very own Fort Henry in Kingston. We have an outstanding range of festivals and events that make Ontario an exciting place to visit year-round. It's not surprising that we want more tourists and investors to see what we see: "There's no place like this."

But there's a world of possibilities and competition out there. Global tourism is experiencing unprecedented growth. International rivals are expected to more than double by the year 2020. Ontario has been working hard to attract visitors from many overseas markets, including China, India and Brazil.

We want more travellers to come here and choose Ontario, but we have to be able to offer them something different. We need to ensure that we can meet the demand for new experiences and new trends in travel. Cultural tourism, eco-tourism and the cruising sector are just a few of the specialty areas that we're developing from Niagara Falls to the far north. The competition is fierce and we need to make sure that we're up to the challenge and at the top of our game. So we're taking a long, hard look at how we can ensure the long-term viability of the tourism sector. We have to think big, bold and out of the box to make Ontario the destination of choice for travellers from around the world.

What are we doing to make this happen? We're undertaking a competitiveness study that will get Ontario talking about the future of tourism, raise the profile of the industry, and deliver an agenda to support the growth of tourism as an important part of our economic development. My colleague the MPP for Vaughan, Greg Sorbara, is chairing the study. He's as passionate about being a champion for Ontario tourism as I am.

I'm pleased to announce that today we have released a discussion paper called Mapping Ontario's Tourism Future. It's a call for input, not just from industry participants but from all Ontarians. We're asking the industry, our business leaders and the community at large to give us their thoughts on how we can build a stronger, more competitive tourism industry.

Let me be clear: Government alone cannot build a thriving tourism sector. It requires all of us, working in partnership and in new ways, to realize the potential that tourism has to offer. The resulting action plan, to be

released in 2009, will provide recommendations to position Ontario as a leading global tourism destination.

In the meantime, I'd like to call on all my colleagues to celebrate the outstanding achievements and the hard work of our tourism industry during Tourism Week. Tourism has a tremendous impact on every region in our province and in every community. It's the single largest employer of our youth in Ontario. Get people talking about tourism in your communities and the important role it plays in generating civic pride and creating memorable experiences for family and friends.

Tell them to take advantage of our 2008 fun pass. Yesterday, I went to Huronia Historical Parks in Midland to announce the fun pass, which provides one free child's admission with the purchase of an adult or senior admission to 15 provincial attractions. We've distributed 1.4 million passes to school children across this province.

The fun pass gives families across Ontario 15 affordable ways to have fun and explore our beautiful province this summer. It will be valid from Canada Day until Labour Day. That's two months' worth of fun and quality time together for families across the province.

The fun pass is just one of the many ways that our government is supporting the tourism industry and boosting Ontario's industry. We're investing more than \$50 million over the next four years in tourism marketing, in festivals and events.

We have already seen some impressive results from our current advertising campaign, which is called There's No Place Like This. The campaign encourages Ontarians to discover the wonderful things that our province has to offer. And it seems our efforts have paid off: Domestic tourism is up. More Ontarians are enjoying the unique experiences—the festivals and events—that take place year-round in our province.

For that, we can thank the energetic people who work in our tourism industry. They are passionate ambassadors for Ontario, and as their champion, I'm proud of the work that they do. I'm glad that Tourism Week gives us a chance to honour their leadership, their creativity and the excellent service that they provide. What better way to do that than by taking time to explore Ontario? Visit our attractions and our parks and say "thank you" to our ambassadors.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SENIORS' MONTH

Mr. Peter Shurman: I am responding to the statement by the minister responsible for seniors in the province of Ontario. How dare this minister, or any other member of the McGuinty government, claim to be doing anything positive for seniors in this province?

Seniors' Month is more than words. It's more than photo ops, hollow speeches, empty rhetoric. I fear this point is lost on members of the government benches.

The minister supposedly responsible for seniors claims she cares about this key segment of our population. If the minister truly did care, why was she absent from last

Thursday's vote on Bill 78, a bill that would have provided real property tax relief for low-income seniors and disabled persons? Come to think of it, a number of Liberal members from ridings with large seniors' populations were noticeably absent from the debate and the vote last Thursday. For example, the members for Ottawa–Vanier, Kingston and the Islands, Nipissing, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, to name but a few, were all absent.

1530

Hon. James J. Bradley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think it's against the rule of the Legislature to make reference to any absences in this House; otherwise, I could make some interesting references right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will remind members on both sides, because the honourable member made reference to a minister being absent. There was a statement earlier from the member for Sault Ste. Marie in which he made reference to his own absence. So we'll remind all members of that.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Point taken.

I guess it's easier to talk the talk than walk the walk. Say one thing when it's politically expedient; do otherwise. It's the McGuinty Liberal way.

The reality is that today's draconian property tax laws punish seniors and push them to the brink of poverty, instead of reflecting the gratitude that the minister says we should display for the important contributions they've made to this province. I guess displaying gratitude for seniors is okay, but when it comes to helping seniors, the McGuinty Liberals are prepared to cripple them financially.

An opportunity for innovative legislation and leadership to help our greying population was lost on Thursday when the McGuinty Liberals decided to vote en masse against Bill 78, which would have created a province-wide, provincially administered property tax deferral system for low-income seniors and low-income disabled persons. For many of us, the most significant investment we will ever make is the purchase of a home. However, every year across this province, ever-increasing property assessment and tax rates threaten that investment.

Seniors want to stay in their homes. They want financial independence. The McGuinty government, however, wants to rob them of their dignity. As demonstrated by last week's vote, Dalton McGuinty's Liberals believe it is quite acceptable to continue with a patchwork quilt of ineffective municipal property tax deferral programs.

What's the real McGuinty Liberal message to Ontario's elderly population this month? "Happy Seniors' Month. Thanks for nothing."

TOURISM WEEK

Mr. Ted Arnott: We in the PC caucus were wondering when the Minister of Tourism would finally get around to doing a ministry statement in the House, this being National Tourism Week, for we on this side of the House understand the extraordinary challenges the

industry is facing, in part because of this government's neglect. That's why John Tory announced his plan to eliminate the retail sales tax on accommodations and attractions this summer.

This would actually do something tangible and immediate for Ontario's tourism. At the same time, it would help attract American visitors back to Ontario and would give our own families a tax break, and allow them to keep more of their own hard-earned money and enjoy their holidays here in Ontario.

In a knee-jerk response, the Minister of Tourism dismissed our idea as a band-aid solution, which shows how out of touch he is. In contrast, listen to how the industry responded. Troy Young, executive director of Attractions Ontario, had this to say: "Anything that can be done to get people moving and enjoying our province's great attractions is a good thing for the industry."

Michael Von Teichman, from the Walper Terrace Hotel in Kitchener, said this: "As we enter into a summer of economic uncertainty, rising fuel costs and a strong Canadian dollar, I believe that removing the RST from hotels and attractions over the summer months will make a big difference to the tourism industry in Ontario. These are the kind of initiatives governments should be taking to support businesses and communities throughout the province."

Now we know that the member for Vaughan, the former Minister of Finance and the chair of the Liberal Party's 2003 and 2007 election campaigns, has been assigned the task of doing an \$8-million tourism competitiveness study. As the PC critic for tourism, I sincerely hope that this study makes a difference. But we need action now, not two years from now, as the study's time frame was initially indicated in this year's provincial budget. Today, we learn that they're speeding it up to release the final report early next year. But I submit that this study could and should have been completed within 90 days.

We still have not seen a line-by-line accounting of how these \$8 million will be spent. What are they trying to hide? Is it Mr. Sorbara's expenses while he travels the province and even around the world, purportedly claiming to look for best practices while enjoying a farewell tour on the taxpayer's dime? Is it that they plan to reward key Liberal campaign—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time has expired.

SENIORS' MONTH

MOIS DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

M^{me} France Gélinas: On behalf of New Democrats, I'm really pleased to rise to recognize this month, the month of June, as Seniors' Month. I'm happy to have this opportunity to honour the contribution made by Ontario seniors in building this province in all aspects: economically, socially, culturally and creatively. Indeed, we are indebted to the energy, the commitment and, yes, the

sacrifices of those who have given so much in order for us to explore today's possibilities.

The theme for this year's Seniors' Month is "Discover the Possibilities." This is a theme that attempts to encourage seniors to live life to its fullest. It is incumbent upon us to help seniors realize that goal. There are key actions this government can take to ensure that our seniors age with dignity and respect.

For seniors to live in their own homes, we must ensure that we have a robust not-for-profit home care system that provides a higher standard of care delivered by the right providers.

Il me fait plaisir de me lever aujourd'hui pour reconnaître le mois de juin comme Mois des personnes âgées. Il me fait extrêmement plaisir d'honorer la contribution des personnes âgées de l'Ontario dans le développement de tous les aspects de notre province. On parle ici du développement économique, de développement social, culturel et créatif. Nous leur devons beaucoup d'avoir investi leur énergie et leurs sacrifices pour nous. Pour leur donner toutes ces possibilités, le thème du mois de juin et des personnes âgées de cette année est, découvrez les possibilités, un thème qui encourage les personnes âgées à vivre leur vie au maximum. Nous leur devons également, chacun de nous, la responsabilité de les aider à atteindre cet objectif.

Il y a, bien entendu, des actions concrètes que le gouvernement peut faire pour les aider à atteindre cet objectif, et pour aider nos personnes âgées à vieillir avec le respect et la dignité qu'on leur doit. Pour les personnes âgées qui désirent vivre à la maison, nous avons besoin d'un système de soins à domicile robuste, à but non-lucratif et qui offre un service de grande qualité.

As well, we must ensure that seniors aren't forced out of their homes by skyrocketing property taxes. We should implement a freeze-until-sale model, as the NDP has advocated, which would freeze the asset value of their home at its purchase price for as long as they own their home. Also, the Assessment Act should be changed to protect low-income seniors who live in granny flats.

I also hope the government listens to seniors who have concerns about the possible limitations to accessing blister packs for their medication. We're receiving a lot of e-mails about that. These packs help many seniors to remain independent in their homes and manage their medication themselves.

For seniors in retirement homes, it would be great to see how the government plans to better regulate retirement homes. From January to March 2007, well over a year ago, the government held 13 consultations across the province regarding the regulation of retirement homes. Unfortunately, we have seen no movement from the government on this front.

I know seniors are asking for improvements.

Finally, seniors in long-term-care homes deserve a minimum daily standard of 3.5 hours of hands-on care.

As important as this month is, we know that a mere month is not enough to express admiration for the value of our seniors. We must show our commitment through

action all year long. New Democrats call on the government to itself discover the possibility of going beyond mere platitudes when it comes to our seniors, who have committed so much to developing this province and have much more to offer yet.

I want to finish by reiterating that New Democrats have always stood, and will always continue to stand, alongside those who worked to build this province and to be their advocates in fighting for the rights, equity, dignity and respect that they deserve. It is our hope that we can work together to do them justice for today and for future generations.

C'était intéressant de voir que le nouveau site Web, www.seniorsinfo.ca, est également disponible aux aînés francophones, mais seulement sous un nom en anglais. Si on est sérieux et qu'on veut que les aînés francophones y participent, il faudrait peut-être penser à le faire en français.

1540

SHEELA BASRUR

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a member of each party to speak for up to five minutes regarding the passing of Dr. Sheela Basrur.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you for this opportunity. I want to take a moment on behalf of Ontarians to celebrate the life, honour the memory and pay tribute to the contribution of a truly remarkable woman, Dr. Sheela Basrur.

Au fil des ans, je me compte parmi les privilégiés qui ont eu l'occasion de travailler avec elle, mais par-dessus tout, j'ai toujours chéri notre amitié. Elle était l'une des femmes les plus fortes que j'ai eu le plaisir de rencontrer.

Over the years I have counted myself blessed to have had the opportunity to work with Sheela, but above all, I will always treasure our friendship. From time to time I would see Sheela in her capacity as our chief medical officer of health, and she was always so keen, so eager, so bursting with energy and enthusiasm. She wanted to tell me about the recent work she had done, and I'd always stop her and say, "Sheela, let's first talk about the important things. Tell me, how is your daughter doing?" And she would smile a smile that would light up this chamber.

I think we reveal ourselves in our unguarded moments, when we talk about those who are closest to us. Sheela always revealed herself to be such a warm, caring and loving mother and person. She brought all of that and then some to her responsibilities. She was also one of the strongest women I've ever had the privilege to meet. She exemplified sound leadership and always carried herself in a way that inspired confidence among the people around her. She was cool, calm, collected, informed, compassionate and reassuring. She met every challenge with the same no-nonsense, calm approach.

When you saw Sheela in action on TV or at a press conference, you knew she was committed to helping you. You knew you could count on her, and you could relax a little because you knew Sheela was on it. Whether it was guiding Toronto through the SARS outbreak, leading the revival of Ontario's public health, answering the call to public service or devoting herself to her family, and her daughter especially, Sheela was on it through everything she touched.

Je sais que son exemple servira de guide à tous ceux et celles qui lui succéderont. C'est sa passion pour le service public qui lui a permis d'avoir une influence aussi extraordinaire sur tous ceux et celles qui ont eu la chance de travailler avec elle et de la connaître.

I know that Sheela's example will guide each of those who come after her. It was her passion for public service that made such an extraordinary impact on all those privileged to have worked with her. Sheela was a true public servant. She believed, and profoundly understood, that the ultimate reward of public service is always to be found in the service itself.

Sheela made a deep impression first as Toronto's medical officer of health and then Ontario's. In the face of SARS and challenges we hadn't seen before, she raised the bar. And because of her poise and stamina, that position is forever elevated in the eyes of Ontarians. We have Sheela to thank for the new heights that public health has reached in Ontario and we will always be moved by all she has done and all that her memory will inspire in the future. So no matter what, even still, Sheela is on it. Her mark and her legacy are now part of the city and our province. She has shown us how to stand firm with grace and good humour, how to make tough calls with calm and how to give the best advice with courage, no matter what.

We are grateful for Sheela's example of devotion to public service, love of family and the warmth of her friendship. She leaves behind a beautiful daughter, Simone, who I know will do well in whatever she pursues. She leaves behind a dear sister and proud parents. I want to take this opportunity to thank the family for the love and support they gave Sheela, and for sharing her with us. I want to assure them that Sheela will live on in the hearts of all those she touched, guided, inspired and cared for. Dr. Sheela Basrur, our Sheela, has made Ontario a better place. We will miss her, but we will never forget her.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of John Tory, the leader of the Progressive Conservative caucus, and the members of my caucus to pay tribute to, and celebrate the life of, Dr. Sheela Basrur. Like all of you, it was with great sadness that we learned of her passing.

I had seen her most recently at what would be one of her final public appearances, the April Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario meeting, where she was recognized with a standing ovation for her outstanding public and personal achievements by a most adoring and

appreciative nursing audience. It was obvious that she was a most beloved public servant.

She was there with her daughter, Simone, her parents, her sister and other family members at her side. She was still, that evening, determined to beat her cancer. She was, as always, to all of us, an inspiring example of courage and good humour in the face of her illness. But that night also she was a proud mother and daughter. She was someone who showed us that evening how deeply she cared for her family.

I first had the privilege of meeting Sheela when I was Minister of Health and she was serving as the medical officer of health for the city of Toronto. I soon learned she was one of the most sincere, hard-working, energetic and dedicated health professionals that I have ever had the privilege to meet. She was truly passionate about public health.

She was dedicated to the cause of health promotion. I was pleased to be involved with her when we introduced our anti-tobacco strategy and heart health program.

One characteristic that always impressed me about Sheela, and my staff noticed it too, was that when she decided to undertake a task and focus on that task, she had the ability to motivate and inspire everyone around her. In fact, the entire community came on board to work with her to get the job done.

She was able, during her time, to recruit and retain many qualified and talented health professionals. Her consensus building, her commitment and her passion for public health in Ontario were exemplary. During an impressive career that saw her do all she could to safeguard public health, her efforts in so many fields saved many lives. Foremost was her work on tobacco control, which included the groundbreaking smoke-free Ontario legislation in 2006.

However, one of Sheela's greatest accomplishments and achievements, for which the public will always remember her, was her strong performance during the 2003 SARS crisis. She earned the trust, respect and admiration of all Ontarians for the extraordinary leadership and quiet confidence she exhibited during this challenging time. She was the calm, reassuring voice of reason. Her grace in the face of tremendous pressure will never be forgotten, as each day she calmed the public fears with her briefings. It was her tireless efforts during the SARS crisis that led her to the position of Ontario's chief medical officer of health in 2004.

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Throughout her career, she inspired all those who worked with her. Her colleagues have told me that she was a remarkable mentor and a role model for young women entering the field of public health. And lo and behold, today, when I was reading the *Globe and Mail*, there was a letter to the editor from a young woman, Liane MacDonald of Toronto, who had not met Sheela but had written to her, and she says, "Today, I'm in the midst of my training in community medicine, thanks in no small part to having an extraordinary role model in Dr. Basrur."

Her colleagues say she commanded respect and got the job done. She had a sharp intellect, was cool under fire, and was an extremely compassionate and gifted communicator. Although her loss is enormous, her inspiring leadership and her commitment and enthusiasm for public health live on in her many achievements. She is a public servant who truly earned the respect and gratitude of all Ontarians.

In recent months, she also earned the respect of, and served as an inspiration to, those whose lives have been touched with cancer as she shared her personal experiences. Sheela leaves behind a legacy. She was, and is, a remarkable, honest and courageous woman, daughter and mother.

On behalf of John Tory and our caucus, I want to extend our deepest and sincere sympathy to her daughter, Simone, and her parents, her sister, her family and her friends. Our thoughts and our prayers are with all of them at this time.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is my honour and my privilege to say a few words about Sheela today. People in the public knew her as a courageous doctor, mostly around the SARS crisis. Politicians, including all of us, and the press knew her as a champion of public health. We knew her for her many, many accomplishments. We knew her for the smoking bans in restaurants and in public spaces. We knew her as being a leader in the banning of pesticides and in the *DineSafe* legislation in Toronto, which was the first in Canada. We knew her for her discussions of childhood obesity and for *Smoke-Free Ontario*.

But I was one who knew her, I think, much better than that. I've known her for 20 years. I knew her as a friend and as a colleague. I remember our first introduction. That day I was a rookie councillor in the borough of East York, in my first stint on the board of health, and she was introduced as the new associate medical officer of health who was brought in for her first stint, her first public job. She had finished university and come to work in the board of health.

I looked at her and you can imagine how young she looked 20 years ago, and even what she looked like until the time of her death. I remember seeing her, and although she was at that time probably in her very early 30s, she looked to me to be not much more than a teenager, a very slight, small woman, but a woman of intense and immense promise.

She was introduced and all of us went to work with her. Right away, at that first meeting, we voted for her to be the associate medical officer of health, not because we knew her but upon the advice of the medical officer of health. It was over a length of time that passed that we got to know her so much more.

We first worked with her on the first ban of smoking in restaurants, which took place in East York. Other cities were doing that too, but Sheela was that gifted and that smart that she was able to look at the smoking bans that were surrounding us in other places like Toronto and North York and advise the board of health and the council not to do it that way. In fact, as theirs were struck

down in the courts, ours continued and was extant throughout the entire period. She was that good and that intelligent, even in terms of the law, that she knew where to go.

In 1990 she gave birth to a daughter, and of course you can imagine that around the borough of East York the medical officer of health was there and was very much pregnant. She continued in her job. She went away to give birth to Simone and came back very quickly thereafter. It was amazing over the years, as a councillor and as mayor, not only to see Sheela constantly, but to see Simone grow up before my very eyes, to watch her inside the borough of East York office, running up and down the halls as children are wont to do, or obeying her mother, which children are often not wont to do. Sheela had very firm and very careful control of her daughter, and her daughter was very much attached, even in those young times.

Sheela went on to be confirmed as the medical officer of health for the borough of East York and she did wonderful things. We became a teaching health unit, which was a real coup for the smallest municipality in what was then Metropolitan Toronto. She came out with a pesticide ban, and we were all very proud of the dandelions that grew on our front lawn; they were Sheela's dandelions, because she convinced us that they too were beautiful.

She was at innumerable public meetings at night. She would always leave as soon as we were finished to go home to her family, but she was there offering sage and wise counsel to politicians who were often reluctant to take it, whether it be the banning of pesticides or smoking in restaurants, because we had constituents who didn't want to go there.

After amalgamation, she was chosen as the medical officer of health for the new city of Toronto, and I was proud to be there as well. We had many candidates that we interviewed but she was clearly the best, and by unanimous consent of the city of Toronto, she became our new medical officer of health. I can remember all of the fights, all of the conflicts that she had with some members who just didn't see it right. But she persevered when people wanted to allow smoking in restaurants and various rooms with smoke eaters, convincing all of us that that wasn't the way to go. I remember her passionate arguments about the restaurant guides which we now see in every restaurant in Toronto: the green, the yellow and the red. You don't want to eat in the red ones. She told us, "Don't eat in the red ones," and it was very good advice from her as well. Today we take all of those things for granted. They were her initiatives.

She also, as the medical officer of health, did something that I never saw any other public employee able to accomplish in the new megacity of Toronto: In every single budget, from the time of amalgamation until she left, there were increases for the board of health and for public health initiatives. You couldn't say that in works, in parks and recreation and in all the myriad other duties,

but in public health she was able to convince our council and the mayor to go that route.

Of course, she's best known for SARS, and we still think of her, as one child described her, as the SARS lady. She was seen around the world and gained great prominence.

She won innumerable awards. We all know about most of them—the Amethyst Award, the Order of Ontario, the honorary doctorates—but the people of East York had one last award to give. There was a reunion on April 5 of this year. We found some little statues that we gave out to East York's finest called the Bulldog Award. Three of these were found after amalgamation and we kept them for 10 years and wondered who to give them to. We had a large contest for the East Yorker who had made the greatest contribution to our community in those 10 years since amalgamation. One of those recipients was Sheela. We sent the Bulldog to her in the hospital through the former commissioner of parks and recreation of the borough of East York, and we note that she received it in the same way and with the same gratitude as she received what some might have considered more prestigious awards.

We recognize her for everything she was to us. In her obituary in the paper in the last couple of days there are words that say she "died as she had lived: with honesty and courage," and I think that's true. We send our heartfelt sympathies to Simone, to Sheela's parents, to her sister, to her family and to all of those who loved her.

Sheela loved words and she loved poetry, so I'd like, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, to quote a couple of lines from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, which I know she appreciated. It reads as follows:

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

Godspeed, Sheela. We will miss you and we will forever remember how you changed our lives. Thank you.

1600

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the members to please rise and join me in a moment of silence in tribute to the life and the career of Dr. Sheela Basrur.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I will see that copies of the Hansard of all three deliveries are sent to the family in tribute to her career.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Hon. David Caplan: I move that a Select Committee on Elections be appointed to consider the current

effectiveness of the Election Act, the Election Finances Act and the Representation Act in the preparation, administration and delivery of elections in Ontario, and to report to the House its opinions, observations and recommendations concerning amendments to these acts; and

That the committee may present or, if the House is not sitting, may release by depositing with the Clerk of the House, interim reports; and

That the committee shall present or, if the House is not sitting, shall release by depositing with the Clerk of the House, its final report to the assembly no later than the last day of the spring session of 2009; and

That the committee have authority to meet at the call of the Chair; to call for persons, papers and things; to employ counsel and staff; and, as the committee deems relevant to its terms of reference, to commission reports and adjourn from place to place; and

That in the event of, and notwithstanding, any prorogation of the House before the presentation of the committee's final report, the committee shall be deemed to be continued to the subsequent session or sessions and may continue to meet during any such prorogation; and

That the committee may examine any other matter it deems relevant to its terms of reference; and

That the committee shall be composed of two government members, one member of the official opposition, and one member of the third party. It shall be chaired by a member of the government. The membership of the committee, including the identification of the Chair, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than Thursday June 26, 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion number 84. Debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm just going to speak for a few minutes, but I think, just to lay the groundwork, that about the best thing I can do in this debate is read into the record a letter from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, John Hollins. It's dated June 4, 2008, and it's addressed to Premier McGuinty.

"Dear Premier:

"The Election Act, the Election Finances Act and the Representation Act, 2005, define how provincial elections work. The existing statutes, which have been amended in an incremental manner over the last 30 years, need to be comprehensively reviewed. The electors of Ontario need to be served by a coordinated and modern legislation, with consistent language, that upholds the principles of access, integrity, and modern electoral management.

"I am therefore writing to the leaders of all parties represented in the House, following the 2007 general election, to highlight some of the changes that I recommend as necessary for the future administration of elections in Ontario.

"Outdated and overly prescriptive legislative requirements governing how people obtain and cast their ballots

are a cause of frustration for electors and poll officials alike.

"Voter turnout continues to grow at advance polls. Electors would be best served by provisions that would allow for greater flexibility in opening advance polls at more convenient times and places.

"Ontarians can vote in federal elections using a special ballot but they do not have this opportunity in provincial elections. Such a measure would ensure greater accessibility for all electors.

"Now is the time to review, design and implement a staffing model and voting process that better serves electors—whether they are in isolated northern communities or major urban centres.

"These are" but "three examples of improvements that require legislative change.

"I encourage the establishment of a committee to review Ontario's election laws with a view to modernizing the administration of elections.

"I thank all of you for your consideration of these recommendations."

It's signed John Hollins, Chief Electoral Officer, Ontario.

That last sentence, "Now is the time to review, design and implement a staffing model ... that better serves electors": These are but three of the examples of improvement that require legislative change. I encourage the establishment of the committee to review this.

That's exactly what the notice of motion that is before us today deals with. It sets up a committee. The committee, as you've heard, will be composed of four members: two government members, a member from the official opposition and a member from the third party. The committee will be charged with the responsibility of delivering its report in June 2009, and the terms of reference are set out in the motion.

I've been through two elections now, 2003 and 2007. Many of my colleagues here have been through elections for the last 30 years. With the experience of two elections under my belt in a busy urban riding, I have seen, as a newcomer, just in my mind, things that I think should be addressed, should be changed and should be fine-tuned so that the electors, if you will, enjoy the process of getting out to vote, are encouraged by the process of getting out to vote and can be assured that their votes that are cast are going to be quickly and accurately counted, that the voters lists are accurately maintained and that we take advantage of all the advances in technology, management and other tools that are available to us in the year 2008 that perhaps weren't available in 1969, which was the last time the Election Act was looked at.

So on the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer, this motion has been brought before us. I understand, without presuming the intent of this chamber, that my colleagues in the other parties are also looking forward to this process of reviewing, updating, refining, finding best practices and so on. For those reasons I urge all of my colleagues in this chamber to support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I think we have agreed there are no questions and comments with regard to the remarks this afternoon. I will be somewhat brief.

I want to say, and I hesitated ever saying, that I think that this is a proper and correct step to take with regard to refining or changing our laws with regard to elections. I'm talking about the composition of the committee and the procedure we are going to go through in order to do this. I think it's proper that the committee not be dominated, as all other committees in our Legislature at the present are, by the government members. This committee will have four members, and it will have an equal number of opposition members and government members.

1610

I look forward to working with this committee, perhaps as the nominee for the opposition party on the committee. What I think should take place here is a meeting of the minds of the various different parties as to the terms of reference of this particular committee. I know the member for Willowdale has pointed out the letter that the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. John Hollins, who is retiring and leaving that position, has written to the Premier on June 4. He sent a copy of that letter to the opposition leader as well—and, I think, correctly.

You know that we had some changes to our election laws not long ago, two or three years ago, and we have now experienced an election under those new rules. I believe that new experiences were gained in the 2007 election as a result of those changes in those laws. Some of those changes that occurred, in the opinion of those of us in the Legislature, were good, and some we didn't think were so good. We'll have an opportunity to review those particular rules as we go forward.

One of the things that I think this committee should do is that we should, first of all, offer each and every member of this Legislative Assembly the opportunity to come in front of the committee and relate to the committee their personal experiences around different subject matters. Whether it's advance polls, whether it's the production of identification in order to get your ballot, whether it's the location of the polls, whether we should be having the election on a weekday or on the weekend, as the returning officer for my particular area, Carleton-Mississippi Mills, held out—he thinks, and I think it's a good suggestion, that we should talk about whether we should have the election on a Saturday, rather than on a weekday. This is particularly important, as pointed out by him, because we have so many polls now in schools, and there's a danger to the schoolchildren as cars pull in and out of those schools. There's great concern by the school officials, the principals, that some of these children might be hurt. It also would allow, I think, many more people to participate in the election on Saturday, as most people in our society, at the present time, do not work on those dates, although there are some who do.

I think suggestions like that by individual members of the Legislature in the right context would give good

direction to the committee, going forward, as to how we might run better elections and offer more people the opportunity to vote.

I do want to say one caution here. It's been my experience, having had a long time in this Legislature—I think the member from Willowdale said that many of his colleagues have been here for 30 years, and I just want to straighten out that there are only two of us who have been here for 30 years: the member for St. Catharines and me. I don't want to share that with everybody. But in reading literature about elections and how elections are performed, not only in this jurisdiction but in other jurisdictions, I guess I would tread carefully when going to new mechanisms—and I don't like the word “modernization” of our electoral process. I look at the historical context of this and, over time, we have learned a lot about the election process and election days. I know in some states in the United States where they've gone to voting machines, they are now going back to paper ballots because of the ability of—

Mr. Michael Prue: They ended up with George Bush.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Well, they ended up, in some cases, with what some people thought was an inconclusive result and it was impossible for them—I'm trying to keep this non-partisan, Mr. Speaker. I do hope the member from York East won't be a member of the committee because he's already expressed some political bias in this debate.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'm kidding him, of course.

I look at this a little bit like the development of our laws in the common law system, where we sort of developed an area of law over a long period of time, and we should not be ready to abandon quickly what has worked in the past. We should think clearly about the fact that a lot of people in our society, a lot of our elderly people, are still not familiar with the computer age, and that their understanding of the process is as important as “modernizing the process.” But we will be discussing all of that as we go forward.

The motion clearly gives the committee the ability to have a wide scope of interpretation as to what they may look into or not look into. But in the final analysis, if the committee does not get along and come to almost a unanimous decision with regard to where they're going, it will be very unlikely that we will see legislation that will change things in here. If we have people trying to stretch the mandate of the committee too far, or if we get ourselves involved in issues where there is great reluctance on the part of one of the political parties, it's unlikely that legislation will change so that that will be accommodated. I think that the members of the committee must work together jointly to try to find common ground to improve the process that we have.

I look forward as well to talking not only to members of the Legislature but talking, if I am a member of the committee, to the chief financial officers of campaigns, to people who are actually on the ground and volunteer-

ing to work on the campaigns that we have at the provincial level.

We have seen some innovation across our country, and I look forward to talking with some of those people in the other jurisdictions of our country in order to determine and take the best that they have experienced from their elections as well.

I think this is a good first step towards reform. I look forward, if I should be appointed to the committee, to working with other members to find common ground, but the bottom line of our position and my position might be or would be that it's got to be there for the elector. We want to encourage more people to get involved in the election. We want to have a more open process. We would like to offer more opportunities for people to be able to vote, but we are also insistent that there be integrity in the elections as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: A bit of a difficult bill here, or a difficult motion. We've only been apprised of it for the last day or two in order to start to prepare to think what we may want to do. Although New Democrats welcome the opportunity to study the Elections Act, the finance act and everything that goes around elections in Ontario, we think the bill may be somewhat circumscribed. It may be too narrow in its scope. But I am given some hope in reading the last paragraph or two, saying that the committee itself has the authority to expand the scope. I trust that is the intent of this particular motion, because if we are simply going to look at the rules and procedures of election day and a couple of other minor things, the all-party committee may be somewhat overblown. But if we're going to start looking at what is really the problem or the potential problem here in Ontario, then I think we have to look at a great many other things.

1620

The first one I want to talk about is election financing. Ontario is lagging behind the other provinces in terms of election financing and is certainly lagging behind the Canadian experience. The government of Canada in its wisdom some number of years ago set about a radical change to election finances in Canada. By and large, I would suggest, they have done a very good job in taking away the influence of big money and corporations and big unions from the democratic process. I'm going to deal with that a little bit more in just a minute. Other provinces have come on board and have done similar things. The governments of Manitoba and Quebec have passed similar legislation to allow ordinary citizenry to shape the way in which their governments operate, to ensure that election finances are the property of the people and not of the moneyed interests, are the property of ordinary citizens and not the property of wealthy corporations or wealthy unions who are able to influence unduly the final outcome.

It seems to me that they have taken this major step with very few deleterious effects—very few whatsoever. I am unaware of a single negative comment emanating

from either of those provinces or from the people who live in those provinces that those rules have done anything except help the democratic process. I think this committee has an obligation to look in that same direction. Can we change the Election Finances Act to actually make for fairer, better and more democratic elections in Ontario? I think we can, and I hope this is included once the committee is structured and has its first couple of meetings.

Second is the whole idea around corporations and their influence in Ontario. We know what the influence was in Canada prior to the changes to their election finances act federally. We know that they were untoward in terms of where the monies came from. I only have to look back to the last election here in Ontario to see exactly where the money was flowing from—excuse me, not the last election, but the one before that. I don't have all of the details from the last one; it's too new.

We know that money from corporations and unions made up 40% of all contributions flowing into the three major political parties. That's where the money came from. So 60% came from ordinary citizens, but 40% came from a very select group of people who had the money and, through their money, were able to influence the democratic process.

We also know that in particular for the two larger or older parties, those being the Liberals and Conservatives, that was even more elevated. Liberals took in some 45% of their funding from corporate interests and the Progressive Conservatives took in over half from corporate interests. Now some may say, "What difference does this make?" Some may wonder, "Who cares whether the CEOs of the Bank of Montreal and General Motors and all these other large corporations are handing out money to political parties? It's harmless. It's safe. It's okay."

I only have to give one very famous quote about corporate donors. This was a fundraiser/developer by the name of Silvio DeGasperis. I think some of the Liberals may know him kind of well. He went to a \$10,000-a-plate Liberal fundraiser and he was asked by the press why he had attended. Why was he there? Why was he giving \$10,000? His answer was very blunt. He said, "I wanted to speak to Dalton about my development issue in Pickering. I knew the reason I was there." So for \$10,000 in a fundraiser, you can get the ear of the Premier of Ontario.

I don't say that the Liberals spent the money in any way untoward other than to buy television advertising or whatever else they wanted with the money, which is allowed under the law, but it's very clear how the money was obtained.

We believe, in the New Democratic Party, that the time has come to do away with both corporate and—I underline the "and"—union donations. We think it's time that ordinary citizens funded the political parties, ordinary citizens with small amounts of money, limited to \$1,000 or less if we can do that. Fund the political party so that the level of interference, the level of expectation is reduced, so that politicians are not beholden to people

who pay \$10,000 to have dinner with the Premier or a cabinet minister or a member of the opposition. Certainly, that is an idea whose time has come.

We also think it's fair for a second reason. That is because if you are a member, a shareholder or a controller of a large corporation or a union, you often are able to make two donations—one through your corporation or your union, and a second one individually. We know from looking at a lot of the records, going back in the periods prior to the last election, that is precisely what has happened in Ontario. We have seen people make a large donation from their particular organization, then we have seen those selfsame people and members of the executive or members of the boards of directors make a comparable donation. So not only can you make one through your body, but you can make a second one individually, the body having paid you to make that donation. We think it's a loophole, a lacuna in the law that needs to be closed. We hope the committee will talk about this, because the election finances are probably the chief thing that needs to be talked about.

We know from examples, public financing, what those examples are. Just to be absolutely clear, federally, each party receives 50% of the expenses incurred if it obtains 2% of the valid votes overall or 5% of valid votes in electoral districts where it ran a candidate. So it's a fairly low margin, and you start to get money back. So even though the same amounts of money cannot be collected because corporations and unions may be shut out, the federal government reimburses candidates who are serious candidates in the electoral process to make sure that the system can function.

In Quebec, they do something similar. In Quebec, if a party receives 1% of the votes, the party receives 50% of incurred expenses, to a maximum of 60 cents per elector, for all electoral divisions in which it ran candidates. This would be very beneficial, I think, to some small parties in Ontario, but it also is extremely and eminently fair. It has a fairly low threshold in the province of Quebec.

In Manitoba, if a party receives 10% of the valid votes, it receives the lesser of 50% of the expenses limit and 50% of the actual expenses. So they're a little bit less generous, but still, there is something in place that allows this to happen.

Last, but not least, in Saskatchewan, if a party obtains 15% of the valid votes, it receives 50% of incurred expenses for all electoral divisions in which it ran candidates.

As I said, contrast this with Ontario, where it is pretty much a free-for-all. You can raise enormous amounts of money, \$7,500 per corporation. You can raise monies from unions, you can raise monies—and you can expect those same people to have some control in the future electoral process. Even though politicians by and large will deny it, and even though, by and large, I trust them all to be honourable members and not to seek that kind of influence, the influence is nonetheless expected.

The second issue I want to deal with is real-time disclosure. Right now, we have a law in the province of

Ontario that mandates that within 10 days of a party receiving money over \$100 and depositing the money, the information must be on Election Ontario's website of the contribution being reported. But here again, there is a huge lacuna in the law. Of course, if the money is received centrally within 10 days, there is an expectation that that will show up on the books within 10 days. But parties get around this in the province of Ontario, and they ought not to be allowed to do so, simply by having people donate money to the local riding association. The local riding association, in turn, delivers the money to the central office if they are wont to do so. That does not have to be, and is not, reported within 10 days.

1630

So it is very eminently possible for a person to hold a fundraiser in the province of Ontario to collect huge amounts of money and have that not reported on the government website. It's not reported because it is done through the local riding association, and the local riding association only has to report that once a year. I would suggest that if monies are collected, it makes no difference to the taxpayers and no difference to the fairness of how this happens whether it is done centrally or in the riding association.

We have the technology available that that can be put online in a matter of days, whether it is taken locally or centrally. It ought to be part of the law. I am hoping that, when the committee meets, this is discussed.

Thirdly, we believe the rules enabling citizens' assemblies and citizen juries have to be changed. We just went through a process in the province of Ontario, the first one in many years. I want to take my hat off to all the citizens who volunteered, who were part of the citizens' committee. They came literally from every single riding in this province, all 107 of them plus a chair. They came together in order to discuss ways to change the way we vote for politicians in Ontario.

Their ultimate recommendation was not successful. It passed in only five of the ridings out of the 107 and was refused in the others. That does not, for even a moment, take away what their accomplishments were: the many hours, the many weeks, the many months that they sat there, studying the proposals to try to come up with a better system than the one we have here now. But, ultimately, the whole exercise was bound to fail. It was bound to fail because this Legislature set a goal that was impossible for any realistic change to actually accede. They put a goal that there had to be a vote of at least 60% in favour, and a second condition of a yes vote in more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in 60% of the ridings, at least 64 electoral districts.

I am unaware of any place in this country, other than British Columbia in one vote, that put forward such a requirement. It was nearly impossible to meet. Fair Vote Canada put out a statement on this that I think needs to be read into the record, because they're absolutely right. I quote Fair Vote—actually, it was Fair Vote Ontario; excuse me.

"No government raises the bar for its own legislation, which often has far-reaching effect on the lives of Canadians.

"No politician has ever refused to accept a seat" in Parliament or a provincial Legislature "due to failure to win 60% of the votes. Many gladly take their seats, despite winning less than 50% or even less than 40% of the votes in their ridings.

"In fact, thanks to the current voting system, most 'majority' governments in Canada gain power without winning a majority of votes."

They are absolutely right. But when we set up a new experiment with citizens' juries, when we ask people to give of their expertise and their time—and, in the end, they are ultimately frustrated before the vote is even taken because of the impossibly high bar. If this committee is going to meet, I am asking this committee to also look at the impossibly high bar that was set by this Legislature prior to the last referendum. If we are serious about involving ordinary citizens and if we are serious in our desire to make democracy work, then we have to make democracy work in the only way it has ever been shown to truly work in this country, and that is to have a majority prevail. You cannot ask for a supermajority and a double supermajority to make change. If that is the case, then change would be nearly impossible to make. If we are to hold future referendums—and I would suggest the idea has some currency, and there may be others perhaps on different matters in the coming years—then we have to make it so that ordinary citizens can effect the change and they are not frustrated in the end by a 60% double majority rule.

I also think what happened in the last election was a bit of a shame. Notwithstanding the citizens' recommendation, it was very poorly conveyed to the electorate. I know that people were coming into my campaign office in the days leading up to the election asking what the referendum was all about. They didn't understand it. It wasn't explained. And trying to tell them the reality—that the citizens were recommending that there be two votes, one for the candidate of your choice and one for the party of your choice—seemed not to be well understood. It was a very simple concept, but the way it was conveyed by the Chief Electoral Officer—and I cast no aspersions on him—was highly technical and was very difficult for them to understand. If we are to put questions before the people of Ontario, we need to spend much more on the education process. We need to put it in much simpler terms and we need to make sure that the electorate, who ultimately vote, are informed.

Fourth, I want to talk about enumeration. This is an old bugaboo of mine. I will continue to say that we need to have a proper enumeration system in this province. Other provinces have a proper enumeration system. They pay people to go around to check the electoral rolls. We have a very sophisticated system through income tax, we have a very sophisticated system if a house or property is sold, but very often people are left out. The people who are left out most often are the young, if they change and

turn 18 years of age from the time of the last vote that preceded it. If they are new immigrants who have become Canadian citizens, they are unlikely to be on the electoral roll. That affects places like big cities, particularly Toronto, but certainly small towns and places all across Ontario, as we are a country and a province of immigrants. They tend to be left out. And last but not least, and perhaps most importantly, we have tenants who move from one building to another. The average tenancy is only about two and a half years—as a tenant in an apartment in Ontario—and then they move. So it is highly likely that the majority of tenants who were in a building are not in that same building four years later when the next Ontario election takes place. The majority of them are not there.

I would suggest we have an obligation to put down an enumeration process. It need not be as difficult as it was when I was much younger and was an enumerator for a couple of elections, where you literally went out door to door. It could be that you have a list and you simply read off the list and say, "This is who we had here the last time," if you don't find them, or, "Can you confirm that these are the same two voters?" You don't have to fill anything out but it still needs to be done.

I will tell you the difficulty of enumeration as it has personally affected me, as a politician of some 20 years. When I was first a candidate for this Legislature, in the by-election in 2001, I went down to register my name as a candidate for the New Democratic Party only to find to my chagrin that I was not on the voters list. I thought this was rather strange, since I had lived in the same house for some 25 years before that.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Hell, you were the mayor.

Mr. Michael Prue: I was the mayor, and there I was, but I wasn't on the voters list. So I had myself listed on the voters list. I thought this was very strange. I checked the income tax records, and of course I was up to date on my income tax, and they had conveyed that the box was ticked off. I wondered why I wasn't on the voters list. So I registered, and that was fine in that election. Then when I went back to vote in the next federal election, I found that my name was not on the voters list. So I went into the self-same office, although it was now federal and not provincial, and I had my name registered on the voters list. I had neither moved nor changed occupations. People still knew me as the mayor, they knew me as the local MPP, but I was not on the list. So I had myself registered again and I voted in that election. The next election, I went back to find out whether I was on the voters list and I was not on the voters list. I had to put my name down again on the voter's list, to live in the same house, to be the same person. And in this last election, for the last time, I had to go and put my name on the voters list again.

1640

Mr. Jeff Leal: You're kidding.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, and the reason was that somebody had taken the opportunity for fraud—you know, people are smart. One person had sent in a letter to

the post office that said that I had moved, in order to have my mail transferred and in order to take advantage of the banks. One person, once. That caused that kind of grief to an individual who has been in the same house and lived on the same street for 20-some years. That's because no enumeration took place.

If that could happen to me, think about ordinary citizens out there. Think about ordinary citizens and the difficulty they have not being on the voters list. Think about some of the older people who come into the campaign offices—you probably have all had them—on the days leading up to election day, and they're not on the voters list. You have to take them up there, they have to swear oaths and they have to take two pieces of identification. They get extremely frustrated. They go from polling station to polling station because they don't actually know which one they're supposed to go to because they didn't get a card either. It is extremely frustrating.

If you want to know why the numbers keep dropping off, I would swear that at least 1% to 2% of the drop-off in every election is people who are not on the list, who are frustrated getting on the list, and finally give up on election day after having gone from polling station to polling station and finding out (a) they don't have two pieces of identification; (b) somebody has already voted in their name, because the fraud is still possible; and (c) it's just that the stuff hasn't been done.

I think we need to look at this. Will it cost some money? Yeah, it will cost some money. But will it be fairer in the end? Will the tenants, will the young people, will the new citizens all be counted? Will people have the right to have their name on there and be able to see it, and not have it changed simply by someone sending a letter into the post office because they want to make you the subject of some kind of mail fraud? These are important things that we need to talk about, and we need to do it.

Some provinces, including, I think, Prince Edward Island, still do a 100% enumeration. If we don't want to go down that route, I still think the committee should talk about having an enumeration in places where there is a need and where they do not have a list that the Chief Electoral Officer in each of the locations thinks is good enough. We need to inform people and households where there does not appear to be a name on the list, to ensure that it has not been taken off inaccurately.

This committee is going to talk about a number of things. One of them is one of the key issues in legislative reform, and it's not really covered in the motion: that is, question period. I don't have to tell the members who are here, even the Liberal members, that moving question period to the morning has been an unqualified disaster. I have heard so many people in the Liberal Party outside of here who don't want—

Hon. David Caplan: Oh, come on. Name names.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, I'm not naming names. They come to me in confidence, and they say that this is not to their liking. They say it's not working.

Hon. David Caplan: Name names.

Mr. Michael Prue: Probably you, then, okay? I would think that the cabinet ministers have a reason to like this because it largely frees up their afternoons; that's what I think.

But I'm not sure that the ordinary backbenchers, some of whom have come to me and said, "It's not working"—I think we should talk about it, because I don't believe it is working. I don't believe it's democratic and I don't believe it's fair. Certainly the press is opposed to it, and the only expert who came before the committee to talk about this said that the idea was a really bad one. Governments are full of bad ideas, and this is one of them. I'd like to quote that expert because he said it very well. Graham White, in his letter, said it very well:

"I cannot imagine that any neutral observer could disagree that moving question period into the morning would very seriously detract from the strongest accountability mechanism available to the opposition. Particularly since majority government is the norm in Ontario, it is vitally important for the people's elected representatives to be able to hold the government to account for its policy and administration. To be sure, question period can, on occasion, descend into bickering, grandstanding and silliness, but it remains by far the most effective mechanism for fostering government accountability and, by extension, for keeping the people of Ontario aware of their government's successes and failures. It is most certainly the only legislative proceeding to which the media pays regular attention."

We believe that if we're going to sit down and talk, there has to be some meaningful discussion, not a government bent and determined on changing the rules of this Legislature because they have a majority to do so against the will of the combined opposition. Sure you have 70 members, but what you did was not right, and what you did is having repercussions against some of your own members.

Hon. David Caplan: Speaker, I don't believe him. I think he's making it up.

Mr. Michael Prue: You can believe anything you want, but if you don't believe the truth when it comes out of my mouth, what can I do?

We also think that another thing needs to be examined, and that is the committee structure and how it does or does not work within the Legislature. We have seen, unfortunately, under this government, a couple of committees be hamstrung on what the committees can and cannot hear, what they can and cannot consider and what they can and cannot vote upon. I think the most glaring example is that the Liberal majority is blocking consideration with the excuse that their House leader hasn't directed them to consider private members' bills. I know that my own colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek's private member's bill—I believe it's Bill 6—was frustrated. It's not that his bill was turned down but that the Liberal majority refused to even hear it in committee, although it was properly before the committee. They voted—all of the Liberal members—not to hear it, with

the excuse that their government House leader had not granted them that permission.

With the greatest of respect, if we believe in the committee process in this House, if we believe that once the bill leaves this legislative floor and goes to committee that we have to allow the legislative committee the option to exercise their discretion and to consider the bill, the committee should be able to call witnesses. The committee should be able to hear deputations. The committee should be able to make amendments to bills, and then they should send them back to the Legislature.

I have no doubt that when it comes back for third reading, it would be the prerogative of the government House leader whether or not to call it. But to stop the process from even hearing deputants, to stop the process from making amendments, to stop bills that have been approved by this Legislature for committee I think is reprehensible. The government ought to just consider what is happening. If the government members on the committee—and they have a majority in, I believe, every case, so although they don't have the Chair of every committee, they do have a majority on every committee within this Legislature—don't want to vote for the bill, they can vote "no." If they want to vote "yes" and send it back to this House and the government House leader doesn't want it to go to third reading, it won't go to third reading. But we have an obligation to every single member of this House who has a private member's bill to allow it to proceed. That includes Liberal backbenchers who have some very good bills before the House.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Like David Zimmer, his regulation of tow trucks.

Mr. Michael Prue: David Zimmer's regulation of tow trucks is probably a fine example. I know that the other day, there was a bill put forward by the member from Brampton Centre, I believe, on fire sprinklers. It received the unanimous approval of this House. I do not want to see it stymied in committee and the committee not be allowed to hear it, the committee not be allowed to have deputants or make recommendations to the House. If it comes back to the House after the committee is finished and the government House leader doesn't want to deal with it, that's a matter for the Liberal caucus, but it is not, I would suggest, a matter of shutting it down in committee simply because the government House leader doesn't want it to proceed. I don't know what authority the government House leader has in the committee of which he is not a member. Perhaps the backbenchers should be asking themselves that and perhaps we should be dealing with this in the all-party committee.

A few other things, before I run out of time here, in terms of what other provinces do and what we need to look at. I have something here entitled the Addition of Votes, and it shows the deposits required of candidates in all of the provinces, and federally, in order to run. Members will know that the courts in Ontario have struck down the provision that candidates who receive less than 10% of the vote can't get their deposit back. You know that that has been deemed unconstitutional and unfair to

people who run for smaller parties. Recently, all of the candidates—not from this past election but the one before that—were ordered to get their refund of \$200 back. I know that many candidates who were not successful, who did not get 10% of the vote, have in fact applied—it may have been 15% in those days—to get their money back. But Ontario, on its books, still requires a \$200 deposit.

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I am not convinced that we ought to be requiring that deposit, in view of the fact that it now universally must be returned, notwithstanding people's failure to get 15% of the vote. So I think the committee needs to look at that. We are one of the only provinces that has stuck with that. Other provinces do charge various amounts of money, anywhere from \$100 to \$200 to \$300, but the provision is now illegal in terms of keeping the money, as the province has done in the past. I would hope that the committee, in its wisdom, looks at that and does not confine itself to the narrow basis set out in the first couple of paragraphs of the motion.

There are other things that need to be looked at as well, and that is the whole issue of polling divisions, polling stations and polling day. Each province sets up a separate electoral period, Ontario's being 28. I believe 28 is, in fact, the absolute minimum. Some have polling days that have a minimum of 26 to a maximum of 32, but in Ontario it must be 28 days. It's set in statute; it's four weeks. I don't know why we have done that in the past. Maybe we need to look at that.

In any event, what is somewhat disturbing is Ontario's fixed date of the first Thursday in October, because the very first time that we ever set that fixed date, it fell into a religious holiday and had to be changed. So we certainly have no history. If there is a better mechanism of setting the date, then it should be set. If we are going to run into religious holidays, I would suggest that there are so many religions, and justifiably so, in Ontario, there are so many holidays from such disparate groups, that no matter how the date is set, this may happen. I would suggest that the all-party committee look at fixing a better date. If the first time it failed, obviously it's not set in stone, so let's look at fixing a better date.

Those are some of the things that I think need to be done. I am asking that when the all-party committee is struck, it not be limited to the couple of small items that are set out at the start of the preamble to this motion, but that it be allowed to completely explore all aspects of the election process, including financing, voting procedures, enumeration and everything else that I've touched upon today. If the committee is able to do that, then I believe it will serve a worthwhile purpose. If it is merely set up to discuss the arcane and picayune details that it seems to be bent on looking at, it will do very little service to this House or to the people of Ontario.

I ask the members opposite, in setting up the committee, to allow the committee full rein to discuss that which needs to be discussed, and to have the committee report back in the appropriate term of ways that we can

make the electoral system in Ontario fairer than it is today.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. I want to indicate that people should be very aware of what, in fact, they'll be voting for or against when this motion goes to a vote. There are a couple of things. One is that while the committee has its terms of reference provided for it in the motion, those terms of reference are meaningless because the committee has the power, by mere majority vote, to deem anything it wants to be relevant and then to include that, by the very process of deeming it to be relevant. In other words, it can turn an elephant into a lion; it can change blue to red; it can engage in all sorts of Orwellian exercises; it can make a fat person skinny, or a skinny person fat, just by saying so.

Let's make that very, very clear. The motion sets out terms of reference at the very onset: the "effectiveness of the Election Act, the Election Finances Act and the Representation Act in the preparation, administration and delivery of elections...." But the committee may examine any other matter it "deems relevant to its terms of reference...."

That means that its scope can be unlimited, literally unlimited. It has the power to look at standing orders. It has the power to look at the location of the Parliament. It can travel the world, looking for more attractive climates in which to build a Queen's Park building. It can do any of those things. Let's make that very, very clear.

The other issue is in terms of the final paragraph here. I was concerned about the language used in the final paragraph in terms of describing the makeup of the committee. The motion says, "That the committee shall be composed of two government members, one member of the official opposition"—that's the Conservative Party—"and one member of the third party"; that's the New Democratic Party.

As a matter of fact, the committee could recommend that we end this silliness of referring to New Democrats as "the third party" and simply say, "the other opposition party."

Mr. Michael Prue: The effective opposition party.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Prue notes.

I've sought the counsel of the Clerk's table, and I am reassured that the language—because it says, "two government members, one member of the official opposition, and one member of the third party," and then that a government member shall be the Chair of the committee. I was concerned that that meant there would be four members of the committee plus a Chair. I'm assured that that language means very clearly that there will be three members of the committee plus a Chair, the Chair has to be a member of the committee, and that the Chair will be one of the two government members.

I would find it very interesting to see this committee—should it be created, should this motion pass—internally decide on a process whereby they're going to arrive at any observations to be reported, or recommendations. Mr. Sterling, earlier this afternoon, made note of the fact

that this, like so many other select committees over the three decades that he's been here—I've been here for two thirds of his parliamentary career. I'm very pleased.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You're a youngster.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Sterling notes that he's older than I am. He refers to me as but a youngster.

I would think it might be very important for the committee to decide at the onset how it's going to reach conclusions. It would be interesting if the committee were to agree internally that there has to be unanimity about any report or any recommendation. That would, in my view, make its recommendations far more potent and far more likely to result in legislative response, if in fact it's a legislative response that's necessary.

New Democrats agree that in this province there is a regrettably low level of enthusiasm for electoral politics in terms of electors, in terms of people voting. When I first received notice of the government's intention to produce not this very motion but a motion very similar to it, the people in the office next to me could hear my eyes rolling, because I recalled how badly the government fouled up the proportional representation issue. Remember when there was a democratic reform ministry? Remember when there was an interest in democratic reform, including a purported interest in somehow making electoral politics more attractive to electors? Its test was, of course, the referendum, which most people either won't recall or have purposely wiped off their memory hard drives because it was such a horrible fiasco—a process that was flaw after flaw after flaw.

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I'll tell you this: Dollars to doughnuts, that MMP referendum did more to turn people off than it did to interest them in ever voting again. There will be a number of Ontarians who, because of that referendum, will never vote again because of the sloppy and incredibly and enthusiastically ineffective manner that it was pursued. Rotten garbage would be more palatable, in hindsight, than that referendum process was. The fact that the government allowed the question that was put to be put to electors with one of the less easily marketable PR schemes in and of itself destined not just the referendum to failure, but in fact appears almost to have been designed—you couldn't have worked harder, you couldn't have done better if you had tried to design a process that would put people in a position where they have no interest in electoral politics anymore, and that will result in a lower voter turnout than we already have.

It was an interesting day; it was exciting. I know Kim Craiton had a classroom of kids from his riding in Niagara Falls, and I had a group here of grade 5 students. Of course, grade 5 is the first year they study civics, politics, and next you get the big emphasis in grade 10. These kids were incredibly bright kids because they knew a whole lot about the politics of Ontario, political parties, their leaders, and the sorts of issues that are being dealt with here.

The other exciting thing, of course, was the attendance of one of our page's families during her service here as a

page. Ellen Tomaino—you know her, Speaker. She's one of the group of bright young women and men who serve as pages and who work hard. What I found is that these young pages end up learning more procedure in three and four weeks—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's true, Mr. Prue. These young pages learn more about the standing orders and parliamentary process than some of the members of this chamber who have slept through years of sittings. And I don't have to name names, Mr. Caplan. Mr. Caplan? Ahem, Mr. Caplan? Sorry, I didn't want to bother him. We should perhaps keep it down a little, Speaker. We don't want to wake anybody up, do we? It's only 5 o'clock. No wonder they didn't want evening sittings anymore.

Ellen Tomaino brought her family here today, and she's a delightful young page from Welland. Her mother, Julie Tomaino, was here; her dad, Mike Tomaino, was here—a pharmacist over at Lewis and Krall pharmacy up in the north end; her sister, Heike, was here; her brother Jay and her brother Willi were here; her grandmother, Faith Tomaino from Port Colborne, was here—she used to be a Mione, from that family, a long-standing, important part of Port Colborne's history; Ellen's grandfather, Peter Tomaino, was here—the Tomaino family is from Calabria in Italy originally; her aunt Christine Walker was here; her cousin Matthew Walker was here; her cousin Sarah Walker was here; and her cousin David Petriw was here. This is a group of young people—Ellen Tomaino, the page's siblings and her cousins—who display a remarkably sophisticated knowledge of politics in the province and in the country, and of procedure and of this Parliament.

I just want to say I was very pleased to be able to join them for lunch and show them a little bit of a tour of Queen's Park and take them through the library. I'm grateful to the library staff. We lost a couple of the younger ones for a few moments in the stacks, but we found them. I'm delighted that three generations of this family were able to come here today, knowing full well of course that we're debating this motion this afternoon. I saw the writing on the wall, or on the palm, so to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Did you buy?

Mr. Michael Prue: Of course he did.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Prue notes one can't invite people to lunch and then stiff them with the bill. I'm too old for dine and dash. I'm just not fast enough anymore. Perhaps I'm too big for dine and dash.

But indeed we did talk at lunchtime about this motion being called this afternoon in the context of what sort of things make voting or participating in the electoral process more attractive.

I for one am not an advocate of making it easier to vote. I do not believe in things like Internet voting or telephone voting. Look, there's a whole lot of people in this world who don't have the right to vote, or when they do vote, it doesn't count for much. There are wars fought

and revolutions taking place and people dying for the right to vote, for the right to elect their representatives.

I think, yes, people should have to make a conscious decision to get up off their butt and get out there and vote. And for the same reason, I don't believe in making it illegal—I believe some jurisdictions like Australia have made it illegal—to not vote. If you force people to vote, will they simply vote for the first name on the ballot? Will they spoil the ballot? How meaningful is it?

Having said that, look, we live in pretty sophisticated times and we come from communities across Ontario where people have pretty high levels of education, but I've still got folks who on a Sunday afternoon, if they see me loading up the pickup truck, say, "Are you heading off to Ottawa, Peter?" It's true. Mr. Sterling knows it. Or they say, "Boy, give that turncoat Dion hell because he won't bring down the Harper government." I'm not in the federal Parliament, I'm in the provincial Legislature. I think I'm reasonably well known in my community, but people are incredibly busy. People are working two or three jobs, when they've got jobs. When you canvass during election time, at 7:30 in the morning folks aren't home and at 7:30 at night they're not home. People are working hard, taking kids to hockey practice and soccer—down where I come from, soccer's really big. We don't have cricket clubs where I come from. We've got a few folks down there who wish we did, after that million-dollar payout last year, but soccer's big down in Welland. Soccer, hockey—swimming is big. Folks are incredibly busy. Seniors are out at the seniors' centre. They're out volunteering. They're out with their grandkids or they're out working, because they can't afford to stay in their homes if they aren't working at McDonald's or Wal-Mart.

So when I say I don't think we should make it easier to vote, I'm not saying we shouldn't accommodate people. I think it's very important to have accessibility. I understand the letter that Mr. Hollins wrote. Good God, he was the electoral officer in charge of the last election, where some of the most boneheaded decisions you could ever imagine were being made. Like our apartment building down there in Thorold, the seniors' centre apartment building, which historically always had a voting area in it, only this year some bonehead decided to move it half-way across town. That was just plain dumb. You don't need legislation or a committee to address that. This Legislature, I suppose, spends an incredible amount of its time regulating moronic behaviour. Come on, it's like telling people it's against the law: "You shouldn't smoke in cars with your kids there." Quite frankly, a person who's stupid enough to do that has little likelihood of abiding by the law, right? They'll get out of the car and they'll smoke in the house with their kids there. That's regulating moronic behaviour.

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The partisanship of the appointment of local returning officers—and I understand partisanship. Partisanship is a reality of political life. But, good God, at least join it with merit, because you've got some returning officers who

are outstanding, excellent. You've got some, though, who are dogs. You can hear them barking miles away. They should be on leashes. They are, and you know some of the ones I'm talking about, who couldn't exercise good judgment if their lives depended on it. Again, that's nothing to do with this committee. Is this committee going to report back that stupid people should not be appointed as returning officers? We don't need to strike a committee to reach that conclusion. Stupid people shouldn't be appointed as returning officers, and while many returning officers are outstanding—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I second that emotion. I've got my own examples.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ms. Horwath has her own examples. We don't need a committee to tell us this. Again, with all due respect to the Chief Electoral Officer, whom I don't know—never met. Some of my colleagues take great pleasure in reporting back that they met with him, sat down with him and talked to him. I know he's retiring, but I find it passing strange that he would write this letter while having conducted this last provincial election, which was pretty sloppy, wasn't it, Speaker? Huh, Mr. Sterling? Some pretty shabby stuff. Some pretty shabby stuff, and fraught with problems. So when I say you shouldn't invite people to vote by merely picking up a telephone, it doesn't mean you should make them climb Mount Everest before they can cast their ballot. You shouldn't be tackling them and knocking them down on their way to the ballot box. Get rid of the dozen Dobermans surrounding the box so that people are afraid to go near it to put their ballot in. But I think Ontarians have to be encouraged to be excited about the prospect of voting in an election. Maybe it has to do with candidates, the kinds of people who run for office. Political parties have a responsibility as well.

I know that other New Democrats are going to be speaking to this motion. I'm pleased because it isn't etched in stone because, if the motion passes, I'm told that Mr. Zimmer will be the Liberal member. I suspect that if the motion passes, the New Democrats will want Mr. Prue to sit on the committee, and I suspect that the Conservatives might impose on Mr. Sterling, who has a full agenda in his own right, a full dance card. But if you want something done, ask a busy person. Look, it's going to take a fair amount of time. I suspect that the Conservatives will ask Mr. Sterling to represent them. I think that's a pretty impressive team of people. You know I'm a fan of Mr. Zimmer's. The people of Willowdale are pretty lucky and pretty smart. Mr. Prue, of course, while perhaps not the longest-serving yet, has a whole lot of political experience under his belt. Mr. Sterling knows darned near everything and he'll tell you so. He's a smart guy. He'll tell you that too if you ask, and sometimes if you don't. But Mr. Sterling is a lawyer and an engineer. I think that's an impressive trio. Mr. Sorbara is an experienced, capable politician who understands politics both as an elected member and from the organizational end of partisan politics, being actively involved in the Liberal Party.

I'm looking forward to hearing comments from other members of this chamber.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to spend a little bit of time on the motion before us this afternoon. I know that my colleagues from Beaches—East York and Welland have set out a number of the technical issues, if you will, or the specific issues that arise which we think need to be addressed and that this committee needs to put its mind to. So we've already laid out a number of those things very clearly.

What I wanted to focus a little bit on are some of the issues following from, in particular, my colleague from Welland in his remarks. We went through an election not so very long ago, and it was the stated purpose of the Chief Electoral Officer of the day, during the preparation for that election campaign, to actually increase the number of people voting in the province. I've got to tell you that if that was the stated goal, it was an absolute, utter failure. We didn't see increased numbers of people voting in the province of Ontario, and in fact that effort was obviously not great enough to make that happen.

I wanted to reflect on a couple of the things that occurred in my own riding and then, subsequently, other people who ran in the last election and some of the concerns that they raised in their particular ridings. Interestingly, they're not all the same. The only thing, in fact, that's in common is that most of these electoral districts were fraught with problems. Not only were they fraught with problems, but they were fraught with problems that could not be resolved by the very people who were hired to undertake the procedures of the election. So we had significant concerns in my riding about a number of different issues, but I think the overarching problem was that, notwithstanding the fact that we had a fixed election date—everybody knew it was coming, right? We had a fixed election date, and yet not only was the voters list a mess, and not only did people who weren't eligible to vote get a voter's card, but those who had voted in election upon election and had never moved weren't getting their voter's card. As the member from Welland already mentioned, people who had been—year after year, campaign after campaign, election after election—voting in the same location, in many cases in their own building, this time weren't able to vote there for some reason.

It was a comedy of errors, and the only thing about it is that it wasn't funny. It was funny because so many people in the province of Ontario, just last year, ended up disenfranchised. People actually wanted to vote and had to jump through hoops to try to make that happen. That is absolutely counterintuitive to what the Chief Electoral Officer brought forward as his stated goal. I've got to tell you, something went terribly wrong. So I, for one, am rather pleased to see that a committee is going to be set up to review some of the procedures and some of the ways of doing things, if you will, around elections in the province of Ontario.

In Hamilton Centre, we firmly believed, at the end of the campaign, after we got together and talked about our

experiences as a campaign team—all of my volunteers, myself, my campaign manager and others—our first and most basic conclusion, and I certainly hope that the committee is prepared to take this one on, is that we really do need to get back to enumeration in Ontario. The bottom line is that we need to have enumeration. That way, we know who is where, who is who and whether they can vote. Because we haven't had that in quite some time, a full enumeration in the province of Ontario, we have voters lists that have people who have passed away. We have people who have moved, many times. We sometimes have a third or fourth tenant since the one that's on the voters list there. So I ask, "Are you so and so?" "Well, no." "Have you ever heard of so and so?" "Well, somebody told me when I moved here that that was the tenant who lived here not last time but the time before that. So before the last tenant and the one before that, that's when that person lived here." Give me a break.

That's why enumeration is so important: It updates the voters lists and makes them more current. Is it perfect? No, it's not perfect, but I can tell you that what we went through just this past fall was a dog's breakfast. It was an absolute nightmare to try to figure out whether the person on the voters list was even alive, and never mind the person who was living in the particular place where you were knocking on the door.

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Another issue we faced was the whole issue of the increased number of polling stations, again a good kind of theory, certainly, but the reality is that the combination of having these greater numbers of polling stations with making all the apartments a separate polling station, depending on the number of people living there, was problematic because of the point that I just raised. So now you have outdated voting lists, where we haven't had an enumeration in much time. Then, exacerbating that, all of a sudden you have all these apartment buildings that suddenly are now going to be voting stations. Well, you put those two things together and you get quite a mess.

That certainly was what our experience was in my riding of Hamilton Centre. I'm going to tell you it was frustrating. It wasn't just frustrating for me; it was frustrating for the tenants in those buildings. They went down to vote in their polling station. Many times they went out of their apartment and thought, "This is so convenient; I can vote on my way to work." So they would be excited, they'd go to vote on their way to work, and guess what? They're in a rush. They just want to grab their ballot, mark their ballot and walk out the door and get to work. But they were told, "If you don't have a voter's card, you can't vote." "What do you mean, a voter's card?" "You should have had a voter's card delivered." "We didn't get a voter's card." "Well, then you have to go through the process of getting yourself on the voters list."

Initially—of course this always happens to some extent—nobody really knew what to do when somebody got there and wasn't on the voters list. So it takes a while to get the warm-up happening at the polling station.

Nonetheless, many tenants became frustrated and angry with the fact that they were being held up and denied the opportunity to vote. They didn't have their ID on them. In the downtown there are many, many apartment buildings. People live in the downtown and they work in the downtown and they walk to work, so they don't have to bring their driver's licence with them or anything else like that. They simply run out the door, down the hall, into the elevator, and away they go. Stop to vote: "Oh, lo and behold, no identification, not on the voters list. You're going to have to go back upstairs to your apartment." "Sorry, it's five to nine. I've got to get to work. Forget about it. I'm not even going to bother."

I believe that this last election resulted in the disenfranchisement of many tenants in my riding and I would suspect in other ridings as well. The other thing is, it's interesting that all of a sudden, where we'd regularly had some 200-odd polls in my riding in previous elections—and, granted, it was a new boundary—this time around, in this most recent election, we had well over 300 polls.

Again, we figured out ourselves how to make that happen organizationally, but I can tell you I didn't get the sense that the returning office figured it out very well. They did not have the ability to staff up all of those polling stations on election day. They had a very difficult time, just during advance polls, for example, to try to figure out how to make all of that happen.

Again, I got a number of complaints during the advance polling process that the DROs—the returning office where you had to go to make your advance vote happen—or some of the other locations were totally unaware of the process and the procedure. So the training of staff was dismal; it was abysmal. As a result, people didn't know what they were doing. People didn't know how to make sure that the people who were arriving to vote would eventually get their ballot in the ballot box. It was extremely frustrating for people: Never mind if you happen to attend and have a language barrier; try to go through that painful process of getting someone who has difficulty with the English language to read the oath. It was a nightmare. We had many, many complaints about that.

Again, not to say it's not appropriate or the right thing to do, to make sure that people are eligible to vote and make sure they have the proper process in place, but, holy smokes, I think it's really incumbent upon the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure the returning officers not only are competent and can answer all the questions—as my friend for the riding of Welland has already indicated—but also that the people they hire are properly trained and understand what their job is, what the process is. That certainly wasn't in many cases—not all—the situation in Hamilton Centre at the very least, which I can speak to directly.

Do you know what? We had another situation where we had a whole building of people, as well as a couple of houses around that building, a high-rise, and they received their voters' cards with their street address on it—

they lived on Wellington Street—but the community in which they were told to go and vote was the community of Dundas. My friend—oh, I'm not allowed to say that my friend from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale would agree with me. My friend would agree with me that Wellington Street is in downtown Hamilton. It's not in Dundas. So people were coming to my campaign office and saying, "I can't vote in Dundas. I don't have a car. I don't know how to get the bus out to Dundas. I shouldn't have to go all the way to Dundas just to vote."

We had other people getting voter cards saying they had to go to Brantford. People were outraged. We were very clear with them that, no, they didn't have to go to Brantford and they didn't have to go to Dundas, but I wonder how many of those people simply threw out their cards and said, "To heck with that. I'm not going to bother to go to Wellington Street in Dundas," or "I'm not going to Brantford to vote. You can forget it." Into the garbage it goes, and that's the end of the election for them.

So, again, disenfranchisement of tenants was something that I think was a big, big problem in my riding. It was very obvious that they didn't know what they were doing. And do you know what? The thing that made it worse for us was that when we raised this very specific problem with our returning office, we got some blow-back. We were actually told that they were not going to mail out replacement voter cards to these people, that they weren't going to do anything to rectify the situation, and if people called them, they would set them straight. They weren't going to be proactive in the way that they responded. That, from my perspective, was an absolutely inappropriate and inadequate response.

I mentioned a little bit earlier the whole issue of the training of staff in the returning office. We had some of the most bizarre things happen this time. I keep thinking to myself that during an election year—and I'm sure other members have this happen—people who historically have volunteered or have been paid staff on campaigns for the DROs or for the returning office and have been paid staff in the election, hired by Elections Ontario to do basic pieces of work during the election period, are the same people. They come back every time there's an election and they want to make sure they get their 20 to 60 hours of work in over several weeks and get a little bit of employment happening.

That's all fine and good. It's not unusual that people come to your office and say, "Okay, can you make sure that my name is in, and put my name in with Elections Ontario?" It's quite surprising, then, when at the end of the day, as the campaign gets up and running and we're starting off and we want our poll keys, we go to the returning office wanting the poll keys—we call up first, "Are the poll keys ready?"—they weren't ready in any timely fashion. That was the first thing. The second thing was, they didn't know what a poll key is. They didn't know at the returning office what a poll key is. They had no idea. We were stunned. We were shocked. How can you not know what a poll key is if you're running the

election campaign, if you're running the election process in this riding and you cannot provide the poll key, not because you can't find it, not because it was filed under Q instead of P, but because you don't even know what a poll key is?

We also had significant problems with our access to maps and with the detailing on the maps. We would get maps of a particular poll and all you could see, the only detail on the map—there wouldn't be any streets—would be the railway track that runs through the middle of the poll, and the poll number. Then, if you go to the poll key and you get the description of where the poll is, all of that is fine, but the maps were a mess.

How can you have a fixed election date, know that it's coming a mile away and still botch it so badly, the way this election was botched? I really don't know—not only botch it, but botch it, all the while claiming that your goal is to increase the voter turnout in the province of Ontario. It's really not much more than a joke, but it's a sad joke. I think the sad joke is reflected in the results of the election, but that's another story.

Nonetheless, those were just a few of the issues that we experienced in my riding. One that I think is the most egregious and one that I think should never ever, ever happen again in the province of Ontario and should never have happened this past election—it's shameful that it did happen, and I think it's particularly shameful that it happened when we have a government in place that indicates its commitment to issues for people with disabilities. They have an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. We just went through the process of reflecting upon people with disabilities in the last couple of days once again. I have to tell you I was ashamed, myself—and I have nothing to do with it—to be getting calls from people who went to vote in their power chair or with their scooter, and the polling station was just not accessible.

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Currently, the way it works is, every effort will be made to have accessible polling stations. Well, every effort may have been made, but I'm telling you that's not good enough in this day and age in the province of Ontario. We need to make sure and we need to make a firm commitment that every single polling station is accessible to people with disabilities—period, end of story.

We had situations of people who called us afterwards and said they tipped their power chair, their wheelchair or their scooter as far as they could get it into the polling station to wherever the barrier existed that they couldn't get past, because it wasn't barrier-free. They would get up to the barrier and they would be telling somebody else who was going in to vote, "Can you get somebody? I need to vote and I can't get my power chair to where I need to go." Then one of the staff would come from the polling station, get the person's name, go back through whatever maze of hallways, rooms, stairs and whatever else, make sure that person was eligible, and bring back the ballot. And they would have to vote at whatever barrier it was that was preventing them from going into

the regular process of voting, into the polling station behind their private place to vote like every other Ontarian gets to do if they don't have a physical barrier that prevents them from getting there.

Give me a break. What the heck is that all about? I have to say that if there's one thing this committee needs to do, it's got to be to make sure that every single Ontarian who has the right to vote is given the opportunity to vote in a barrier-free environment. It's extremely important, and it's something that is long past due. I was shocked to hear the way these people were treated in my own riding. It was absolutely unacceptable. It's not good enough that you set out the boundaries of where your polls are going to be, and then try to find a place that you might be able to pinpoint that might be barrier-free for people. That's not good enough. That's the opposite way of doing things. It should be done, first and foremost, to make sure it's accessible to all the people of Ontario.

I heard that there were some significant problems as well in the riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. Apparently, entire apartment buildings received duplicate voter cards in error in the revisions process. One of the candidates whom I know very well was there personally. At that time, she went to check out the situation and in fact found that it was true, the complaint that came in—total duplicates. An American citizen was there who actually received a voting card—an American citizen, not a Canadian citizen, not dual citizenship; an American citizen received a voting card.

There were of course also people who were receiving voter cards from former tenants, and they used those voters cards to vote. But the reality was, people were so ticked off with the poor implementation of the voting card mailout and the process of receiving these voting cards that had nothing to do with them—if you looked in the garbage in the mailroom, it was packed with discarded voting cards, just thrown to the side. Anybody could pick them up. If people weren't having their ID checked, they would end up being able to vote.

Advance polls in this riding were extremely slow and frustrated people. In some cases, it took people 20 minutes, half an hour to vote. People got ticked off over the delays, gave up, turned tail and left and decided not to vote.

Apparently, the oath wasn't available in other languages so that people could have an easier way of taking that oath and not be humiliated in trying to stutter through the English language. That oath has some very long words in it that are difficult for many people.

The bottom line is, this committee has a lot of work to do. I look forward to some good results from their work.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Boy, do I have a lot to say about this particular work the committee's going to have to do in looking at the Election Act and what needs to be done in order to modernize it. I listened intently to the comments made the speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre, who basically talked about the litany of problems within her riding. I'm sitting here chuckling to myself

because I thought they only did that in my riding. I'm finding out they've done it in a number of other ridings.

Let me, first of all, set out what some of the key issues are that this committee has to look at. I think the first thing is the election list itself. The electoral list is far from being as accurate as it needs to be. We don't do physical enumeration anymore. Enumeration is done as far as revisions only, so we're relying on databases that the province has in order to build election lists.

That's the first problem: We don't do a very good job of identifying the voter. One of the things that this committee's going to have to look at is, do we need to go back to physical enumeration, knocking on doors and finding out who lives in the apartment that's being rented during the period of the election, who lives at that address? We did that for a long time in this province. It worked well and the election list used to be pretty accurate. But nowadays, my God, I'm telling you, you would look at the election list and you would find as high as 20%, in some urban centres within my riding, where the election list was totally wrong. So that's the first thing.

Then, when they went out and did the revisions, they got that wrong. They would take the person who lived on the corner of street X and Y, where the polling station is normally right across the street at the school, church or community centre, where they've been voting for years, and they'd put them, sometimes, in other towns. The person would have to drive 20, 30 kilometres away to go vote in another polling station that had nothing to do with where the person lived—all because the revision basically messed up.

A big part of the problem is people who live in rural route addresses. There's no physical address within the database to correlate where the person lives, to put him in a polling station. So one of the issues we have—for example, I had tons of voters; this would be the typical story. A person lives in, let's say, Moonbeam, has been voting in Moonbeam all her life in federal, provincial and municipal elections, but had to go vote in Fauquier, Kapuskasing or Smooth Rock Falls, which is a half-hour drive, depending on which way you have to go, or even up to an hour on a highway.

I'll tell you what people did on election day: A lot of people didn't vote. That affected my vote, as the incumbent. It also, quite frankly, affected the Liberal and the Conservative vote. I know that in that part of the riding our provincial Liberal candidate, Mr. Boucher, had some complaints about that. A lot of people he had identified—and I guess I can say thank God for me that they didn't go and vote—had a hard time trying to find a polling station.

So I guess it kind of equalled out the results in the end, but the point is, people really got frustrated on election day. All they know is, "I've been voting at the KC hall for years." That's where you normally go vote, and all of a sudden they've got you voting in another town somewhere else.

The member for Hamilton Centre raises the issue of polling stations. Boy, what a problem. Wheelchair accessibility in some of them is not even available. Basically, people are turned away, not able to go vote.

In the case of Hearst, which I thought was really silly, we have les Chevaliers de Colomb, the KC hall. Basically all of the polling stations for the 10 or 11 polls in the community of Hearst are within that one central place where people go and vote. There's lots of parking, it's wheelchair accessible, there's lots of room; it works well. We've been doing it for years.

What they went and did this time is, they moved it out of the KC hall and they put it in a couple of different locations, one of them being a school. The problem is, during the time that the voting was going on, wasn't that the time that the buses come and pick the kids up and drop the kids off? You should have seen the melee that was going on during the busing times, where we're picking up kids at the school and dropping them off. People were trying to find places to park. There were traffic jams with the buses. It was unsafe for the kids. The kids are not used to seeing that amount of cars around the school. It was a day that was raining so we had puddles of water and mud everywhere. It was more complaints, so people just didn't go and vote. People said, "I'm not going."

One of the issues that was raised by one of the teachers—and I think this is a legitimate issue—the way they had the polling stations set up, people had free access to the school. Do you want any voter just walking into a primary school and having open access? Hello? I'm not saying anything happened—people in Hearst are pretty decent people—but I'm telling you, that's open for problems. I've just got to say that we need to get that under control.

One of the key problems is that we need to replace the way that we appoint returning officers. They should not be appointed by the government in power. They should be appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer. Here's the problem: The RO doesn't work for the Chief Electoral Officer; the RO responds to the government. So when a member—or a candidate in this case, because we are all candidates at the point of the election—goes and makes a complaint about a polling station or an advanced poll or whatever it might be, they can complain until the cows come home. At the end of the day the RO will make the decision even though the Chief Electoral Officer agrees with you.

Let me give you an example. In my riding there are communities that don't have roads. The only way you can get into them is to fly in by plane. So they decided that there would be no advance polls in any of the First Nations communities. The only place you had an advance poll was in Moosonee, at the Northern Store or at the college; I forget exactly where it was. The first problem is, who can afford to pay an airplane ticket to fly from Attawapiskat or Peawanuck to an advance poll because they will not be available on October 10? Why? Because the First Nations people go hunting at that time. That's how they get their food. A third to half of the community

is out of the community during the period of the election on October 10. They've got no advance polls, so they can't mark their ballot ahead of time because they cannot afford to get on Air Quebec to fly, at \$1,000 a pop, to Moosonee to vote and go back. And that's for each family member.

I called and went and saw our returning officer in Timmins, and she didn't want to do anything about it. She was not going to waste taxpayers' money to give those people the right to go and vote in advance polls. Can you imagine? Imagine those people not having that right. They're the First Nations people of our country. They're citizens of Ontario. You'd think we wouldn't have a problem with this.

So I called John Hollins, the Chief Electoral Officer for Ontario. He agreed it was a problem. I give John Hollins and his staff full credit. He tried to fix the problem. The problem was that the returning officer went, "Nyeeah," and basically there was nothing he could do. Pardon me, I've never done that before in the House, but that's basically what our returning officer did. As a result, because the CEO didn't have the authority over her to fire her, she just did what she wanted to do because of incompetence or unwillingness or whatever—

Interjection: Political agenda.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —or political agendas—and it didn't get changed.

So I think one of the things we have to do is say, "Returning officers for each riding are hired by the Chief Electoral Officer and are answerable to him or her." In that way the Chief Electoral Officer, who is a non-partisan appointment, because we in the House here appoint him in a tripartite process, has those returning officers answer to him or her and has the authority to deal with problems as they arise. One of the things I want to see is a change to the Election Act that deals with that.

The other thing I want to deal with, and unfortunately I don't have a lot of time because we're going to be wrapping up here in two or three minutes, is the whole issue of—I did the First Nations. The other thing is the whole issue of when people show up to vote in the wrong polling station. People were basically being turned away, and you know as well as I do that that shouldn't be the case. Unfortunately, the people who are the poll clerks and the people who are the DROs, the district returning officers, don't understand the Election Act. We spent a good part of the day having to work with our DROs and our poll clerks to get them to understand what they could and couldn't do under the Election Act. So here are campaigners having to train the poll clerks and the DROs in what the Election Act allows on election day. That shouldn't be the case. That should be the job of the RO. I just say again that it goes back to the Chief Electoral Officer's having the ability to appoint the returning officers for each and every riding.

I don't have enough time, but the other thing I would talk about is the need for election finance reform. I think we need to look at what the federal government has done vis-à-vis having elections paid by the state, because we

pay them anyway. If I give \$750 to your campaign, I am going to get 75% of it back by the province anyway. So we're paying for all the contributions that are given by way of donations to our campaign up to \$750, I think it is—\$750 and you get 75%, and everything after that is a percentage, up to a maximum of \$1,140 or \$1,125, whatever the number is. The point is, we're paying for it now, so we should make this system clear and transparent so it's not big business or big labour that does the contributions to campaigns, as people would see it, but that we have real election reform so we can have transparency in the system.

Mr. Speaker, I see we are close to 5:45, so I would just adjourn the debate for now and pick up where we left off next time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You're right.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 5:45 of the clock and our guests from the Council of State Governments being here for dinner, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, Thursday, June 5.

The House adjourned at 1745.

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