



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 26 February 2009

Jeudi 26 février 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 February 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 février 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence, of inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN ECONOMY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 25, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes / Projet de loi 150, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et visant à développer une économie verte, abrogeant la Loi de 2006 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et la Loi sur le rendement énergétique et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: This debate, despite the government's attempt to make it so, is not about whether green energy is a good thing or whether we should support the quest for a safer environment any more than my tie today makes me more or less motivated to live a greener life. We all know that we should, and we know that we have to. There's no debate about that at all.

This debate is less about a bill and more about vision, about honesty, about good policy and effective government. We live in an era where governments have the opportunity to introduce groundbreaking, innovative legislation that will revolutionize our lives. Ontario is indeed at a point at which it can and should choose a direction that will be an example and an inspiration to other jurisdictions. It is beyond disappointing that, with Bill 150, the McGuinty government is choosing again to squander that opportunity.

We already know that on McGuinty's watch Ontario has slipped from first place to last on the economic front. We know that there is no real leadership there to tackle the challenges that face our province now and which we will face in the future. We also know that the reason that

this bill has been introduced now, without proper briefings for the opposition, without consultations and without any details outlined in its text, is because Mr. McGuinty would rather discuss a root canal than talk about his failure to address Ontario's economic crisis.

So two days ago, we heard the Minister of Energy lead off the debate on Bill 150. When he was czar of the Ontario health ministry, he built the LHINs, and you don't need me to tell you how well that worked out, how economically efficient and responsive our health care delivery did not get. At the rate at which resources disappeared at the Ministry of Health when he was minister, he'd run out of sand in the Sahara, given the opportunity.

Now, we let the fox back into the henhouse, this time dressed in a green robe, under the assertion that no one but he can bring green energy into Ontario, and that no way is a good way unless it's his way, never mind that it destroys real estate investments, negates personal freedoms and changes Ontario's energy infrastructure to something right out of Stalinist Russia.

He wasn't satisfied with H One, OEB, IESO, OEFC, ESA, OPA and CCO. Apparently there weren't enough acronyms in the systems yet, so he brought in REFO, which makes most of the other acronyms mean SFA, perhaps for the Secure Future Agency. This bill is crap—concerted robbery of all people. Is this a Liberal thing or what? When in doubt you create an agency?

First, the recent MPAC assessments, which Mr. McGuinty refused to review or reassess, and which increased property tax payments for most Ontarians, are bleeding our residents dry, assessing our homes at the peak of the cycle and now forcing us to pay taxes on a value we couldn't get if we sold—and many homes are having to be sold. I don't see any cities or towns lowering their mill rate to make the adjustment.

Just yesterday, across my desk came the position of the Ontario Real Estate Association. I quote their president: "This mandatory government regulation will impose a significant cost on home sellers." They have four points, and I'd like to read them into the record.

Point one: "Mandatory home energy audit reports will have serious cost implications for home sellers. Those with less than ideal energy audit ratings will face pressure from homebuyers to either spend thousands of dollars to improve the energy rating of their home or lower their sale price. Many middle- and low-income Ontarians simply cannot afford the cost of financing home energy retrofits."

Point two: "Those sellers who can afford expensive retrofits will want a premium sale price. As the cost of

housing rises, fewer and fewer low- and moderate-income Ontarians will be able to find affordable housing. Government policy should promote affordable home ownership.”

Point three, and this is a big one: “Seniors will also be disadvantaged by mandatory home energy audits. Most Ontario seniors rely on the equity they have built” into “their homes for retirement. Mandatory home energy audits will force homeowners who are seniors to complete energy retrofits at a tremendous cost to their retirement savings” at a time when they can ill afford it.

Point four: “Mandatory home energy audits will adversely affect first-time homebuyers” because “the majority of homes that will not score well on home energy audits are resale homes.”

Important points to consider. Add to that actual losses that property values have suffered—over 6% in York region since last year—plus land transfer taxes basically doubled right here in Toronto, and what you have left are a number—indeed, thousands—of beleaguered homeowners struggling to salvage the investments they have made in their homes over many years. Our homes are, for most of us, the biggest single investment of our lives.

Enter the McGuinty team with fox in tow. They decide that now is a good time to whack the homeowner over the head with yet another hurdle, the mandatory energy audit. Beyond adding an extra cost to the sale of a home, the Liberals decided that it would be a great idea to help devalue the last investments that people may have left after their savings and retirement plans have taken the hit they have already taken on the markets.

What a fantastic thing to tell seniors whose retirement savings have been slashed in half: that they may have to put an extra 20 Gs into their home before they go ahead and sell it. What a time to do that. What a great thing to do to people who have lost their jobs in this economy and are trying to downsize, just so they can make ends meet. Let’s hear it for Team McGuinty, who chose this particular moment to make sure that Ontario homes are devalued even further, and their owners will struggle that much longer in an already difficult housing market.

0910

Hey, Ontarians, this government is trying to tell you that they will do everything they can to get green energy to Ontario. What they are not telling you is that they will take everything you’ve got to do it their way. They will. Why use a carrot when you can use a stick, right?

The sheer shamelessness of this bill is offensive to me, and if my correspondence is the yardstick, also to many Ontarians. The only thing that is green about the Green Energy Act is its title. Otherwise, it is as dirty as the coal plants that Mr. McGuinty, in two elections, promised to close but which are still open; the same coal plants that Mr. McGuinty could have cleaned with relatively acceptable dollars for high-tech scrubbers and which could have been a resource in the future of Ontario’s clean energy plan, much like clean coal plants are an integral part of Germany’s green energy strategy. Germany is touted by this minister as the model, by the way.

Liberals claim that this bill will create jobs. How exactly will it do that, and how did they arrive at 50,000 as the number? There is nothing in this bill that would actually support the claim of creating any employment outside of government-paid jobs. As written, the only thing that I can see Bill 150 creating is 50,000 inspector overlords with sweeping powers to monitor our residents’ energy consumption: “Excuse me, ma’am, I have a search warrant to measure your refrigerator’s power consumption, so I’m coming in under this warrant.” Can you believe that? Can you believe it? I cannot believe that we are actually discussing a bill that will allow provincial inspectors to descend on our homes to check on our energy conservation. What’s next? Curfews? Food rations? Food rations checking for no trans fats, of course.

With Bill 150, the minister is implementing regulations that will undermine whatever economic stability Ontarians have managed to retain in these times of economic crisis. People fear for their jobs. They are afraid for their families. We have entered a cocooned siege mentality period, and in the name of all that’s green and holy, this minister and the McGuinty government are preparing to drop an economic bomb on families. They are ready to say that he is on our side and that we, on this side, are not pro-conservation or pro-renewable energy if we vote it down. That would be patently untrue.

My suggestion to my friends the MPPs on the government side is that you take a good long look at your constituent e-mails, your calls and your letters before you stand in party solidarity to vote. Because if you push this down their throats, your vote may well add a member to my caucus to replace you. Ontarians know something is not right here. They know it when they see it, and they know, at the same time, that green is good, so there is an obvious disconnect. They will support green energy—Ontarians will—but they will not accept your plan to get it.

Liberals call Bill 150 revolutionary legislation, but all they really have is a pickpocket bill, a pickpocket bill with Ontarians as the designated victim. They tell us that energy costs are rising everywhere, but they don’t tell us that their plan will increase the price of power in Ontario well beyond worldwide levels.

For all the regulation that they are subjecting Ontarians to, the Liberals are leaving themselves ample room to manoeuvre out of any accountability. I can hear it now: “That extra debt retirement amount on your power bill is not a tax. No, sir. It’s what you owe the electricity supplier for infrastructure buildouts. But McGuinty didn’t raise taxes.” Well, the old saw: A rose by any other name is still a rose.

There are no benchmarks. There are no goals. There are no real commitments included in Bill 150, just a lofty assertion that we are going onto the green wagon; we’re climbing aboard. They say they want a green Ontario, but they’re remarkably shy about explaining just how they’re going to get Ontario there. Now, I’m not really that surprised. If there’s one thing that we have learned about this government, it is that it won’t take the risk of being transparent.

Providing relevant and quantified information means that residents and stakeholders alike might turn to the government and well say: “This won’t work. We don’t have the infrastructure to support this pipe dream. It’s too costly to consumers. You’ve got to have a better plan or you will jeopardize the quality of Ontario’s power.” Even McGuinty hasn’t yet figured out how to get a good photo op out of that criticism.

So Mr. McGuinty decided that he won’t bother Ontarians with relevant details such as what the power would cost and how much they would have to pay, and that he wouldn’t provide any sort of guarantee that this plan will actually succeed in providing sufficient energy generation to meet Ontario’s energy demands. He decided to quietly omit the fact that Ontarians would end up paying at least 30% more for their electricity, and that’s if the scheme works at all. That is a very large number at a very bad time.

It’s too much to expect Mr. McGuinty to be accountable for his decisions, so what do we know about this so-called plan? Sadly, the answer is, “Nothing substantial.” Will the price the government sets be enough to attract investment? Can the people of Ontario afford the price that would attract investment? If the price is too low, there will be no interest from investors, and if it is too high, it will be too costly for taxpayers. But this act affords broad powers to the minister to basically do whatever it takes, and in this area, at this time, for Ontario, we cannot afford “whatever it takes.” Green energy, yes; this model, absolutely not, at least not without an amazing amount of work.

No wonder Mr. McGuinty would rather avoid the issue. He needs to give his communications team extra time to figure out how to spin either of these scenarios, just in case. This is vintage McGuinty rearing its head. “Don’t worry about the ‘how,’” he tells Ontario, “You don’t need to know.”

He is wrong. We need to know exactly what we are dealing with, and we need to know it now, before we can vote on it. I am not willing to take it on faith that this government will work it out in the end. I have no reason to believe that, and Ontarians have no reason to have such faith, especially at the costs they will have to bear, with absolutely no recourse.

Not a single thing that Mr. McGuinty has said or done has inspired any kind of faith in his leadership. He has blundered through government, coasting through the good times, by fiddling with meaningless legislation while he should have been on the lookout for warning signs and preparing this province for an economic crisis. They are somewhat cyclical; sometimes they are deeper. That is the case now. I ask rhetorically if we were the least bit prepared, and I say no. And now, when the time comes to debate something that could be the difference between making and breaking our province, that could be setting a new course, he chooses to move forward with his pet projects on the backs of the very people who are trying to keep this province alive.

I once spoke in this Legislature and complained about the lack of substantive legislation to debate. Well, here it

is, and look at it. It impacts everything and everyone in the way of green power, at any cost. I said this before, I want to say it again: Tunnel vision is an unacceptable flaw in a government. And did I mention tunnel vision is an unacceptable flaw in a government? If you, as leader, are incapable of fixing one problem without bringing the province to its knees somewhere else, then it’s really simple: We can’t afford you any longer. You’ve proven over and over again that you have no leadership, you have no ideas, you have no policies to answer the challenges of the 21st century.

0920

This government is incapable of doing anything at all to help, to improve one thing in this province without sabotaging something else. It’s kind of like an elephant going into a shop to buy a teacup and destroying three dozen sets of dishes in its wake. How any Liberal members are able to go back to their constituencies, look their constituents in the eye and defend this travesty of a bill, I don’t understand. How you are able to tell your constituents that you are supporting this bill while you are jeopardizing their livelihoods is beyond me. “Jeopardizing their livelihoods” sounds like hyperbole—it sounds like gross exaggeration—but it’s not. Every day it gets worse. One day it will level out and get better, but we haven’t reached it yet, and now is the time you want to put this imposition on them. I have a hard time understanding that.

Ontarians deserve better. They deserve a real plan. Here is an environmental tip for you: If you want to be green, save paper until you have something that’s worth printing on it. Bill 150 doesn’t cut it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I just want to remind honourable members that when referring to other members, we refer to them by their riding name or their title.

Questions and comments?

M. Gilles Bisson: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président, pour la chance de commenter le discours de mon ami de Montréal, qui a l’occasion de parler en français des fois ici à l’Assemblée. C’est un projet de loi intéressant. Comme il a dit, c’est un pas dans la bonne direction. Je ne pense pas qu’il y ait personne dans cette Assemblée qui dirait : « Cette direction n’est pas une bonne direction. » Je pense qu’à la fin de la journée, le commentaire que le député a fait est complètement vrai; c’est que tout le monde veut être capable de faire mieux pour l’environnement. Tout le monde est du bord de s’assurer qu’on fait ce qu’il y a à faire comme individu, comme compagnie ou comme gouvernement pour être capable d’avancer comment mieux protéger notre environnement.

Mais la question devient, est-ce que ce projet de loi nous amène vraiment dans cette direction d’une manière concrète? Je pense que c’est le point que le député essaie de faire, qu’à la fin on voit ce projet de loi qui dit, « On annonce une bonne direction », mais quand ça vient aux détails, il y manque beaucoup de détails faisant affaire avec ce qui pourrait vraiment concrétiser les actions que le gouvernement peut faire dans ce projet de loi.

Par exemple, justement, je parlais à un des députés ce matin de la question d'être capable de faire des investissements dans nos maisons personnelles faisant affaire avec l'usage de l'énergie solaire, l'énergie du vent ou autre. C'est très dispendieux. Tu parles de 12 000 \$ à 14 000 \$ pour faire cet investissement-là, et quand tu regardes ce que tu vas être capable d'économiser, soit sur l'hydro ou sur le gaz, ça ne tient pas debout quand ça vient à l'économie.

Donc, on a besoin d'avoir des programmes qui pourraient aider à accélérer ces investissements-là avec l'assistance du gouvernement, parce que chaque kilowatt qu'on est capable de conserver est un kilowatt qu'on n'a pas besoin de générer sur l'autre bord. Je pense que ce qu'on a besoin de regarder dans ce projet de loi est d'essayer de concrétiser comment être capable de mettre en place ces actions qui vont allouer aux individus d'être capables eux-mêmes de vivre une vie beaucoup plus verte.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It's a pleasure to have a couple of minutes this morning to speak about the Green Energy Act. I certainly want to respond to the good member for Thornhill. He challenged us to go back and look our constituents in the eye. I'm going to tell you that for the past year I have been looking my constituents in the eye with regard to green energy and green energy opportunities.

Just the day before yesterday, I was over at the ROMA-Good Roads convention and looked in the eye the mayor of the township of South Stormont, when he once again commented on and referred to three projects in the township of South Stormont that they're chomping at the bit, as the old expression goes, to get going in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. I've met with Mayor McGillis, I've met with CBO Hilton Cryderman and I've met with CAO Betty de Haan from that municipality, and I've met with developers who are anxious to get going on projects of the kind that are being referred to in this Green Energy Act. To the member from Thornhill, I can say I'll look my constituents in the eye, and I know that they're going to tell me: "Go for it. Get this Green Energy Act through and let's move on."

Yesterday I heard the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex stand here and talk about green energy opportunities in his riding and the opportunities for jobs. There will be jobs created in my riding if we can get these projects off the ground. I know that by working with Honourable Minister George Smitherman and working with these companies, we will get more jobs in eastern Ontario and more jobs in the township of South Stormont in my riding. I certainly appreciate those people who come to me with the ideas that we can go out there and support through this Green Energy Act. To the member: We have it in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member, of course, did an excellent job in making the case. I think that's an appro-

priate comment from the other side. He made a wonderful case.

During the election of 2003, the Premier stood up and said, "You know, we're going to close all the coal plants. We're going to close them all by 2007." That's where he gets his information on green energy, too, I think. I don't think he quite knows what the consequences of that are.

He's talking about 50,000 jobs being created. Well, unless they hire 35,000 auditors to look after the \$200 to \$300 energy audits, they're going to fall well short of that, as they fell well short of their credibility in closing coal-fired plants. Holding the price of energy to a 1% per year increase again is closing the coal-fired plants by 2007—there's no credibility to that number whatsoever, none whatsoever. A 1% increase would be almost impossible under this plan, if we're going to have a full recovery program with this Green Energy Act, which I understand is supposed to work out that way. Unless this government is going to subsidize the cost of electricity through taxpayers, there's no way that can come to fruition.

The member from just north of Toronto—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thornhill.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —Thornhill makes an excellent point: that the credibility of this government is significantly at risk. They have proven in the past that they have been unable to live up to their promises. Of course, this government is absolutely famous for breaking promises, not the least of which was closing the coal-fired plants. Closing the coal-fired plants was something that we said was impossible during the election. They knew it was impossible, and they promised it anyway, the same as this act. It's just not going to happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I was listening carefully to the member from Thornhill for almost 20 minutes. At the beginning, I thought he supported the bill, when he started to talk about how he believes in green energy, and the tie he's wearing matches the ideology and philosophy. But when he started talking about the bill and said "but" and I started to listen to him, he went in a different direction. He doesn't like the bill, I guess. And you know, that's fine by us. We have a different direction. We're committed to green energy and committed to the people of Ontario, to create more jobs, to make sure all the houses in the province go with our agenda, which is a green agenda. I believe strongly that this is the right way to go.

I had the chance to listen to many people from my constituency, London–Fanshawe. They talked to me about the importance of this bill, and many people are excited to participate in these programs because they think, and believe strongly, that it's the best way to go for a greener future.

0930

I'll talk about creating jobs. There's no doubt in my mind that this bill is going to create jobs. It's going to convince and create incentives to many homeowners to

change their electricity habits and also change their furnaces and their windows, whatever they have, in order to be able to participate in this program. I believe strongly that it's the right step towards a brighter future, and I want to congratulate the Minister of Energy for bringing such an important and bold initiative forward in order to make sure the province of Ontario does not depend on coal energy or dirty energy, and for switching the whole atmosphere around in this province, to have all the people in the province participate in the mission to have a green future and green energy.

In the end, I would wish the honourable member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The honourable member for Thornhill has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Merci. C'est une opportunité de pratiquer mon français dans l'Assemblée aujourd'hui pour répondre à mon ami de Timmins–Baie James. I wanted to do that because he addressed me in his native tongue, and one that I share with him.

I think that there's an interesting theme developing here, regardless of whether I listen to my colleague from Halton or I listen to the members from Timmins–James Bay or Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry or London–Fanshawe, and that is that everybody here has the same goal: We want to create a greener, sustainable, renewable system of delivering energy to Ontarians. I pointed out at the very beginning that, yes, I think at this point in our history, believing in green energy and wanting to supply it and rebuild the grid and rebuild the system in Ontario is a priority. So there has never been any disagreement with that. The issue is how you're going to do it, and that's why my comments—because we're debating the bill—were negative on the “how,” not the “what.” We agree on the “what.”

My colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry responded to my call to my government colleagues, of which he is one, to talk to constituents and see what they feel by very pointedly saying, “I've done that. There are three projects that are ready to go.” I don't doubt that. There are a lot of people who want to build these projects. There are a lot of people who are waiting to hear what the return to them is if they do act as providers, as there are many, many individuals who are waiting to hear what the result is going to be in terms of how it's delivered to them and for how much.

So when I say to talk to constituents, I say talk to individuals, because, to my friend from London–Fanshawe, who says he has, I can't believe that there's so much difference between London–Fanshawe and Thornhill. My mail is very negative, and it's not because Thornhill is entirely blue and London–Fanshawe is entirely red.

It is not the “what,” it is the “how.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you for this opportunity to speak on Bill 150, the Green Energy Act.

There's no more important goal than to build a vibrant and sustainable green economy and energy system in our

province. Our environmental grounds: We urgently need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in order to minimize the already damaging effects of climate change. Economically, we need to spawn the development of a new economy that provides decent jobs for the future, while protecting and respecting our planet.

Bill 150 calls for government investment to upgrade the electricity transmission and distribution grid to support a greater proportion of renewable energy. Few would argue with that. Bill 150 aims to create a culture of conservation by greening public buildings, improving energy efficiency standards for appliances and making energy efficiency a priority of the building code. That sounds good, too. Bill 150 seeks to ensure that renewable energy projects are environmentally sound but don't take years to get off the ground. Who could argue with that? The government says the act will spark the development of a vibrant and growing green economy in Ontario. That should be welcomed.

But apart from the good words and lofty goals, the question is begged: Will this act actually stimulate the kind of green energy transformation that our province so desperately needs for both economic and environmental reasons? The minister claims that it will, but the minister claims a lot of things. The minister claims that Ontario is a leader in green energy production, while a more objective look at the Ontario Power Authority plan suggests otherwise. In fact, OPA is very conservative in terms of its renewable energy ambitions, only aiming to achieve about one sixth of what the Green Energy Act Alliance has deemed possible.

The minister claims that Ontario is making energy conservation a priority. Meanwhile, a recent report from the Ontario Clean Air Alliance shows that for every dollar that the Ontario Power Authority spends on energy conservation and efficiency, it spends \$60 on new energy supply. The minister says that we need new nuclear plants in this province to meet our energy needs, yet group after group and expert after expert, including Dr. David Suzuki, says that Ontario can meet its future energy needs without new nuclear but through renewable energy and conservation alone. The minister says that his approach to electricity supply is balanced, yet the Ontario Clean Air Alliance recently showed that the McGuinty government is willing to spend 50 times more for a kilowatt of nuclear energy than it is willing to pay for a kilowatt of energy conservation.

So we in the NDP, and indeed all Ontarians, should ask serious questions about this legislation: Will it actually significantly increase the percentage of renewable energy in the electricity grid in Ontario? Will it significantly enhance the level of conservation and energy efficiency in the province? Will it help to reduce our reliance on polluting and non-renewable forms of power such as coal, natural gas and nuclear? Will it protect individuals and companies who are vulnerable to electricity price increases? Will it ensure that Ontario becomes a leader in manufacturing of renewable energy technologies? At this point in time, the answers to these questions are lacking.

The minister says the act will lead to a rapid expansion of renewable energy, but refuses to set any targets or timelines for the increase in green energy. The act is supposed to provide loans and perhaps grants for retrofits and conservation, but the bill has no details about how many, how much money and what will be supported. The minister says that attractive feed-in tariffs will be paid to green energy producers, but we don't know what these tariffs will be, so we don't know whether they will be high enough to spark many new green energy projects. The minister says there will be reasonable domestic content rules, but again, the proposed legislation provides no details as to the extent to which energy producers will be required to purchase components or services domestically.

The minister is quite specific about some things, like the claim that 50,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created over five years, but has done little to explain how this number is arrived at. The minister claimed that the act will lead to only very modest increases in electricity rates, about 1%, but can't say how much renewable energy will come online when or what the feed-in tariff paid will be.

There are elements to the act that on the surface make sense: the creation of an energy facilitator to support new projects; stronger building code standards; more efficient government buildings; more efficient appliances. But there is little detail about these initiatives: their scope, their cost, their impact. Many hard questions need to be answered by the government if it is to show Ontarians that the act is in fact a green energy act and not merely an act of greenwashing.

At this time, I want to address four main concerns with the bill: lack of targets for renewable energy, uncertain costs to vulnerable ratepayers and energy-intensive industries, uncertainty about the creation of jobs in Ontario and, finally, the question of public-private mix of power production.

First of all, there is the question of targets and caps. The minister said yesterday that Ontario is following the European approach of no targets or caps. He said that by paying an attractive feed-in tariff, the government is creating an open-ended opportunity for the production of renewable energy and that it is not up to the government to set limits on how much green energy is provided to the grid. But in the next breath, the minister said that 75% of Ontario energy will continue to come from nuclear and hydro. The fact is, by continuing to pursue costly, dirty, unreliable nuclear, the government is setting a de facto cap on the development and provision of renewable energy because only so much energy is needed in the province of Ontario.

The potential for renewable energy is vast. According to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, Ontario's wind power potential is more than 10 times greater than our total electricity consumption, and Ontario's biomass potential from agricultural and municipal waste is equal to 25% of our electricity consumption. We also have untapped water power potential and can import large amounts of hydro,

if necessary, from Quebec. Despite this vast potential for renewable energy in Ontario, according to the latest OPA plan, the McGuinty government only plans to develop 8,000 megawatts of renewable energy by 2025. That's only 500 megawatts a year for the next 16 years. The renewable energy contribution in Ontario, according to the current OPA plan, will increase from 22% this year to 30% in 2016. Between 2016 and 2025, renewable energy will be flatlined. That's no renewable energy for nine years.

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To put this in perspective, over the next 20 years, Ontario will install less than one fifth of the solar panels that Germany has put in in one year, and in 2027 Ontario will have less wind capacity than the state of Texas already has today.

Why are other jurisdictions moving faster than Ontario when Ontario has an abundance of space for wind power and an abundance of access to the sun? Why is Ontario setting its renewable energy sights so low? The main reason is that by remaining stubbornly committed to building new nuclear plants in order to have nuclear power continue to comprise 50% of overall generation, the government is capping the growth of renewable energy.

That is the message of leading environmental groups in the province. According to Greenpeace, "The government's 2006 electricity plan caps the development of green energy so the government could meet its self-imposed target of maintaining nuclear at 50% of supply." According to the Pembina Institute, "Ontario's electricity plan actually halts construction of all new wind turbines in 2018 in order to leave space for the new nuclear reactors that the province is considering purchasing." According to the David Suzuki Foundation, "To be effective in making Ontario a global green energy leader," the government must avoid "new investments in nuclear facilities to avoid 'capping' renewables and efficiency gains due to oversupply from non-renewable sources." According to the World Wildlife Fund, "We will get a sign of the degree of ambition when we see the new" OPA "plan in March."

The bill supposedly establishes the right to connect renewable projects, but the McGuinty government is putting nuclear first and leaving only the leftover space for green energy. In other words, as much as Bill 150 might encourage new investment in and production of renewable energy, it is doomed to failure unless the McGuinty government reverses its plan to build new nuclear plants at Darlington and to refurbish its Pickering B plant and opens up space on the grid for renewable energy.

Yesterday again, the minister said that we need nuclear energy because renewable energy sources like wind and solar are unreliable and intermittent. The double standard here is interesting. Complex new generation nuclear energy plants like the ones that the Ontario government is considering are facing unresolved technical setbacks around the world. New designs from Westinghouse, AECL and Areva, the contenders for the contract

to build new nuclear plants in Ontario, are all either in prototype stages or years behind schedule in deployment. And there is no accepted safe solution for storing radioactive waste, yet this government talks of nuclear as a proven and reliable source.

On the other hand, it characterizes renewable energy as flawed, unreliable and intermittent, ignoring the fact that the storage of wind energy is now viable; ignoring the complementarity between solar and wind—wind may not blow as much on hot summer days, but the sun does shine; ignoring the vast and reliable potential of renewable energy sources such as waste-heat recycling, combined heat and power—so-called cogeneration—and biomass.

Why does the government maintain so much faith in nuclear and so little faith in renewable energy? The minister said yesterday that continuing to draw 50% of Ontario's electricity supply from nuclear plants makes it possible to pursue green energy. I think the minister has it backwards: The continued reliance on nuclear for 50% of the electricity supply for Ontario doesn't make this act viable; it does the opposite. Pursuing new nuclear energy in Ontario dooms Bill 150 to being entirely marginal, to bringing only small amounts of renewable energy online in Ontario, something that would have happened even without this bill. If the McGuinty government is serious about aggressively increasing green energy supply and conservation, it would put a moratorium on building or refurbishing nuclear plants until it at least sees what potential Bill 150 has to spark in these new renewable projects.

Even the minister's own staff has suggested, while the new nuclear plants remain on the table, that there is a need to see how this goes, and anything is possible. In other words, new plants may not be necessary if the renewable energy response to the act is strong. If the act is as great as the government suggests and if reasonable prices are paid for renewable energy, then surely it will stimulate the introduction of more than 8,000 megawatts over the next 16 years. The government can't have it both ways. It can't say that the act has the capacity to rapidly increase green energy supply and then limit it to 500 megawatts a year by giving priority to its nuclear plants.

It's not only the NDP that is concerned about lack of strong baseline targets for this green energy bill. Two University of Western Ontario professors, who interviewed 63 wind developers, also say that the act does not go far enough because it fails to include long-term targets for renewable capacity and leaves too many decisions to ministers. They say that the act does not remove investor uncertainty that has hindered investment to date because it does not establish long-term targets for renewable capacity, and instead "leaves key decisions on targets and power pricing in the hands of the minister," who can easily change policies if political priorities shift. They say that the Green Energy Act further broadens ministerial powers, exposing policy even more to political pressures.

The second key issue is about costs. Yesterday, the minister suggested that this bill would only increase

ratepayers' tax cost by 1%. If the government hasn't yet seen the price at which they will buy green energy and won't say how much green energy will come online, then how do they know electricity rates will only go up by 1%? Given the fact that the feed-in tariffs for wind and solar are two to three times higher than the cost of coal-fired electricity, how is it that the increase in hydro rates will be so low? A good question. The only way I can see that rate increases will be kept low is if the government is anticipating a very low uptake of the program, contrary to their rhetoric of turbo-charging green energy development.

Whatever the rate increase, we know that low-income people are very vulnerable to changes in expenses. We hear increasingly of people becoming homeless, not because they can't afford rent, but because they can't afford their utilities. The government says that there will be some protection for low-income people, but, again, the bill tells us little in terms of what these protections will be.

It's not only low-income individuals who are threatened by increasing hydro rates. Struggling companies in the resource sector are already being pushed out of business by high electricity rates in the province of Ontario, and they're moving out of Ontario at a drastic rate. Xstrata and AbitibiBowater are recent examples of large companies under constant pressure to move.

Electricity already costs \$72 per megawatt hour in Ontario, the second-highest in Canada. We have Niagara Falls, the biggest producer in North America for electricity. We sell it to the States.

Hon. George Smitherman: No, we don't.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, we do.

We have many falls up north that are not being utilized. There are towns and cities in northern Ontario that could be self-sufficient with electricity, but they're putting it into the grid and then their prices go up. It doesn't make sense. The NDP has called for an industrial hydro rate of between \$45 and \$50 dollars per hour, but the McGuinty government has ignored their calls as usual.

What will be done to protect these companies from further hydro rate hikes and more job losses in struggling parts of this province? I don't know. Which brings me to a third and final concern about Bill 150: the lack of specifics around domestic content requirements needed to stimulate new green jobs in Ontario. It's true that setting a fair price for renewable energy is the key to attracting investments in green energy production, but we need to ensure that components for solar panels and wind turbines are produced in Ontario.

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I'll give you a perfect example of what the government should be pursuing in the city of Hamilton. We have National Steel Car. It's the second-biggest producer of railway cars in North America, with a workforce three years ago of 2,200 employees, mostly welders. They are now down to less than 600. The company is talking about building a new plant in Alabama and pulling out of Ontario. They've been there 100 years, the last Canadian

railway car manufacturer. Why? Because the federal government is also to blame. They are allowing these rail companies—CP, CN—to lease these cars that are built in the States, taking jobs away from Ontarians.

Here's a perfect opportunity for the minister to go to Hamilton, because I've talked to the president of the local in Hamilton and a company representative. Their plant can be retrofitted quickly to accommodate building wind turbines and other structures that would be part of the new renewable energy. They have the facility. They have the manpower. They have the transportation right there in Hamilton. National Steel Car should be utilized, and the company has expressed an interest in going to the green energy system.

We know that the act allows for regulation of domestic content quotas, but again, the levels remain to be determined. The government repeatedly cites the 50,000-person-year job figure over three years, but 16,000 jobs per year doesn't go a long way when 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost over the last four years. Moreover, the industry observers question whether the 50,000 target is feasible given the lack of trained workers and time to get the project off the ground.

Finally, there's the question of public versus private delivery of power. Why is the McGuinty government allowing large, private companies to produce green power while continuing to bar OPG from producing green power? How will factoring in profit margins for companies impact electricity rates? The Quebec government has made significant advances in renewable energy and job creation through a public power model. Is the government sure that a feed-in tariff model that excludes the major public utilities is the most efficient and cost-effective approach?

In summary, the NDP shares the objectives outlined in the bill for a green energy future for Ontario. We most likely will support the bill to committee, but we sure need a lot more amendments and a lot more input, and we have serious doubts as to whether the act will achieve this objective without reconsideration of government plans for new nuclear energy and without better protection against electricity rate increases.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to respond to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and take the few minutes that I have before me now to put some facts forward in response to the rhetoric that we hear in the context of the debate, and reaffirm and explain our government's commitment with respect to renewables.

The facts are that Ontario has already brought about 1,000 megawatts of new renewable energy online since October 2003. More than 1,200 megawatts of renewables will be online in 2009, and that is enough to power 325,000 homes.

Investment in renewable projects already in place or under construction in Ontario totals about \$4 billion. As the member did not refer to, our minister has directed the Ontario Power Authority to review the portion of the

proposed IPSP focusing on renewable energy and conservation, because since 2003, such progress has been made in the renaissance of Ontario's energy sector, including developing a plan to get rid of coal-fired generation by 2014 while at the same time renewing Ontario's nuclear power fleet.

The amount and diversity of renewable energy sources will be examined. The viability of accelerating the achievement of stated conservation goals, the potential of converting existing coal-fired assets to biomass—all of those questions are being examined in light of the recent successes that we have had, to just reaffirm to this House that unlike the member opposite, many others do believe that this government is absolutely on the right track. We only need to refer to the editorial in the *Toronto Star* dated February 24, “‘Green Energy’ Includes Nuclear.

“The government has good reason to stick with nuclear power, which currently accounts for 50% of our electricity.”

It is part of a green energy strategy going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and/or comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: First of all, I have to say that any time my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek speaks, I know that he speaks from the heart and he speaks with passion, and I admire that passion. If his speech in this debate, along with mine and those of some of the other members opposite the government who have spoken, is any indication, it's further proof that we really needed significant and fulsome hearings at this stage, before we got into a second reading debate. There are so many stakeholders who would give credibility, or take it away, from one position or the other, and it proves further that the positions are divergent.

I've talked about the lack of detail that this bill has exposed and the lack of consequences that we are able to calculate as a result of some of the elements of this bill, and have got great agreement in the words of my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Where we differ is that our party's position is very much pro-nuclear and the NDP's position is anti-nuclear. I would argue—

Hon. George Smitherman: Oh, really?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Yes.

I would argue on behalf of nuclear as a part of a green strategy; however, we recognize that it's a non-renewable. I would prefer to discuss that and look to examples like France, where the majority of power is generated with nuclear facilities, rather than deal with one of the suggestions, for example, that my friend has offered, which is, “We'll import a significant amount of hydraulic power from the province of Quebec.” Albeit that's possible, we have no way of knowing at this stage whether Quebec has the appropriate capacity going forward for the long term. So we have to be self-sufficient, and we saw that during the huge brownout of four or five years ago.

The bottom line here is, everybody has an idea that says “green”; everybody has a different idea of how to do it. That's why substantial hearings are required.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to say that I was listening to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and I agree with a lot of the points he was making. I agree with his approach, which is saying, “Listen, this is how you can make this bill better.” I think these suggestions are going to make the bill better, because that’s what we need in this. It is a huge undertaking the minister has done, and I look forward to him putting that input.

I know one of the areas I’m also interested in and something he has raised in Hamilton is, how can we ensure that these jobs in the new economy can be created in our own ridings and our own cities and towns across Ontario? I think this is really a great opportunity to do that. That’s where we have to spend our time and energy, as opposed to the old Conservatives, who just sit around saying, “Well, this should have been debated last week. This is too slow”—all these clichés about the bill, and name-calling. They’re the old protectors of the status quo, which is basically saying, “Sit around; do nothing. Everything is fine.” But we don’t have that option.

We all agree we have to take some effective, intelligent action on this front as we face climate change and issues of energy independence. This, I think, gets us toward energy conservation and energy independence, and on top of it, it creates a dovetailing into the new jobs of the new millennium. That’s where we have to go. We don’t have a choice. There is an economic, environmental imperative to do this.

So the people who talk about maintaining things and—these name-calling approaches aren’t the answer. We have to move forward, and I want to say that’s where we’re going with this.

The other thing that we’re fighting, too, is all the people who say, “Well, we’re against nuclear,” yet they’re out in droves protesting wind. They’re against the wind—the NIMBYs, you know? Then they’re against solar farms. Then they’re against natural gas-fired generation. So I tell them, by being against wind, solar and natural gas—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: At the outset, let me say that I do support a certain amount of wind power.

There are two things you have to understand about wind power. Firstly, when you build wind power, the wind doesn’t always blow, so you have to have backup power to support the wind power. Last summer, July 26, I believe, was the hottest day of the year. Ontario had about 48 megawatts of wind power available for generation. As is typical with a very hot day, the reason that it’s so hot is because there’s no wind. The same thing could be said of a very, very cold day. It’s very cold because there’s no wind to stir the air. But that July 26—I believe that’s the right date—when there were 48 megawatts of wind power available for generation, there were two megawatts being generated, because there was no wind in the province. When you build wind power,

you also have to build backup power that goes along with it.

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So not only are we looking at—I don’t know, pick a number—16 to 20 cents for wind power generation in a modern wind turbine; not only do we have to build that power, but we also have to build something in the surge area—perhaps natural gas, perhaps clean coal—in a reasonable area.

Germany is building 26 clean coal plants to back up their wind power. It’s a very green program in Germany. It’s seen to be a very green program in Germany. The NO_x and SO_x generated out of a clean coal plant are identical, or almost identical, to those generated out of a natural gas plant. It’s a very, very clean process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to thank the members from Thornhill, Halton, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Eglinton–Lawrence for their comments.

In reference to the statements of the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I disagree with them. She actually made an error by saying that they’ve created 1,000 megawatts since 2003. That’s probably correct; however, if you break that down, that’s about 170 megawatts a year, and falls quite short of their 500-megawatt promise in the new Green Energy Act. That’s nothing to be bragging about.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: That was a Liberal promise.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, that was another failed effort.

In reference to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, I thank him for his comments. I feel that, yes, we can work together to make this bill better for Ontario and for the people of this province. I’m glad to see that the minister is willing to work with suggestions from all parties about improving this bill, because it benefits us all and makes us a little more self-sufficient and less reliant on world economies and world energy, and we have lots here to spread out.

The comments of the member from Halton were well addressed, but he said that the backup generation—if the wind doesn’t blow, we don’t have electricity. If the green plan is effective, as the government says, we have biomass and we have gas. But I would also like to mention to the minister that maybe he should consider re-energizing the project that fell short, by the federal government in Hamilton, with cogeneration from the coke oven plants in the steel mills. They can create a lot of energy for the grid. That should be looked at as soon as possible.

All in all, I think that everybody basically wants to improve our situation in the energy sector in this province. I believe that, with some co-operation, we can do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I’m pleased to enter the debate on Bill 150, the Green Energy and Green Economy Act, and I’m speaking in support. First, I congratulate the minister

for this bold initiative and a very important step toward a greener future.

Many speakers before me talked about different directions and raised so many questions: from the opposition, from the third party and also from our colleagues. No doubt about it, it's a very important step. It's a very complex, huge bill. It's very important for the people of Ontario.

No doubt, we have to raise so many different questions. We are introducing this bill in this House to be able to listen to suggestions from the opposition and the third party. I listened to the Minister of Energy responding to the member from the third party. He said: "Yes, I'm going to take your questions seriously. I'm going to address them one by one. As a matter of fact, I've addressed most of them, and we're going to work on all of them in order to make sure that Bill 150 serves the people of Ontario, serves our agenda and the future of this province."

Everyone around the globe is talking about climate change: talking about our effect on the climate, on the polar bears, on flowers, plants, fish and many different species around us. Many different elements in our life affect the species around us and our environment and make it warmer. That's why we're seeing a lot of crazy weather on a daily basis in Ontario and also around the globe, from floods to extra snow or less snow. Everything around us is mixed up because we throw a lot of dirt in the air, mess up our air and make it less clean and also warmer. Therefore, our duty and obligation is to do something about it. That's why this bill came about: in order to help the environment and create green energy to serve our needs for industrial and domestic use.

This debate has been around for many, many years. Every party has a different philosophy, has a different approach as to how we can act on this issue. I want to thank the Minister of Energy for coming forward with his bold initiative in order to address it in a professional and scientific manner in a very important era, when our economy is struggling and looking for some kind of stimulus initiative. I think strongly that this initiative, this bill, will create some kind of stimulus to our economy. It's going to convince so many people in the province of Ontario to reconstruct their homes and have strategies for lighting their houses and using energy. It will create jobs on construction sites, in the service industry, in installations, financing, engineering, and computing systems. In many different aspects of our economy, this bill is going to create great movement in our economy. We believe strongly that it will create more than 50,000 jobs.

This question has been asked by the opposition and responded to by our government: How can we create those 50,000 jobs and how did we come up with this number? The people I spoke with last week and this week—especially, when the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, came to London and made this announcement in our riding, London-Fanshawe, he spoke to many different stakeholders, from the chamber of commerce to energy producers and environmental groups, and all of them

were very impressed by our initiative. They thought it was a great and bold initiative toward a greener future and toward correcting the mistakes that people before us made in order to make this earth dirtier and unfriendly for the species who share life with us.

When we introduce something new, people get suspicious and ask a lot of questions about it. They get scared and have a lot of questions: How can we do it? How will it affect our lives? As you remember, when we introduced the energy bill, Bill 100, four years ago when Dwight Duncan was the minister, I served on that committee and we travelled the province of Ontario. We listened to a lot of stakeholders who raised a lot of concerns. After four years, people are very comfortable about it, especially with the smart meters, which have software to allow people to monitor their consumption of energy. Now people are happy and comfortable.

This initiative created big jobs for the people of Ontario. A big company in Kingston produces the smart meters. We are not just supplying the people of Ontario; we also supply many different jurisdictions outside Ontario. So I think it's a very important step.

Also, when we created a smoke-free Ontario, I still remember that many people from my riding, especially the restaurant owners, came to us and complained. They thought they were going to lose their jobs and it was going to affect their businesses. Many people started complaining, came to all of us from both sides of the House and complained. But look: Now it's very normal. If you go to a restaurant or coffee shop and you see somebody smoking, it's something weird and different. Sometimes when I go to different provinces or countries and go on the train, the bus, to coffee shops or restaurants and see people smoking, I feel different. I'm not comfortable, because after many years, I guess we get accustomed to it and we start to feel the positive effect on us.

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This bill, I think, is a very important step. I listened to the member from the third party speaking about his doubt about our ability to implement it. I've witnessed the Minister of Energy on many different occasions and on many different bills. I served on the social committee, and we went around the province of Ontario to discuss the bill he introduced in this House. I noticed his determination and his commitment to the project he moved and initiated. I think this bill is going to see the light. It's going to see important steps toward making sure the province of Ontario is fit and will be ready for the future.

All this talk about how we can consume energy, how we can conserve energy, how we can save on energy—I heard people talking about Germany, I heard people talking about Denmark, I heard people talk about Spain. I watched the movie by the David Suzuki Foundation. He went on a trip with his daughter to Spain, Denmark and Germany. He showed us how they utilize the wind and also the solar system in those countries and harness the electricity and feed their grids. But you know what? I've heard a lot of stories about it. You know how much a kilowatt costs in Germany? Twenty cents per kilowatt.

How much does it cost us in Ontario? Way, way, way less than that.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to know about London.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Well, yes. We're talking about our people. When we make a comparison, we have to make a fair comparison. Also, we have to remember how much Germany depends on nuclear—almost 60% to 70%, the dependency on nuclear.

If we pass this bill, I guess by the year 2025 our dependency on nuclear will be reduced by 15%. Also, we're going to create a conservation culture, and that culture is going to go across the province of Ontario. We're talking about creating jobs. I heard the minister the other day respond to the member opposite about the content of this project—at the present time, 50% content—and the future. As we go into the future, it's going to be 60% and 70% and 80% and maybe 90%. Maybe in the future, if we create that culture, it will go across the board to colleges and universities, and then many different researchers can get involved in this project. It's going to give us the ability to produce green energy tools and materials. We can expand it and sell it across the globe. I think it's a very important step.

We have an initiative in London, Ontario—myself and my colleague the Attorney General—a project we do every year. What we do is we invite so many different environmental companies, energy companies, producers of energy and people concerned about the environment to a project we call Think Globally, Act Locally. So many different stakeholders come to this event. We have it every year. It's going to come this year in April at White Oaks Mall in London, Ontario, in my riding.

People come from many different cities and small towns to visit all these shops. People talk about solar systems, wind, conservation, environmental materials. People talk about degradable cups and forks and spoons and many different products. They are things that are very important to creating that culture and educating people about the importance of protecting our environment. Also, if they take the initiative and convert their homes to be—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Anybody from Peterborough there at that event?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Well, we have a company from Kitchener that also came to this area.

I also want to tell you something. Yesterday, I went to Peterborough Day. I was very impressed. I had the chance to speak to many people working in the energy field, and they were very impressed with this bill and supported this bill, trying to convince the members from the opposition party to support it because they think, with scientific evidence, this will help the province of Ontario, help the people of Ontario and create jobs in Ontario.

I think I don't have much time. I want to continue the debate in the future with more examples from my riding of London–Fanshawe. We believe we have a lot of different initiatives, we have a lot of companies, a lot of solar panel companies, that want to take advantage of this bill and also make sure all the people in Ontario are able

to participate with the government, as a whole society, to make sure the future is greener and to protect our environment. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. It being just about 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like members to join me in welcoming Vic and Beth Degutis, who are here from my community. They're both outstanding leaders in the area, particularly in the area of education, and we welcome them to Queen's Park today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll take this opportunity, on behalf of the MPP from Oakville and page Alexander Glista, to welcome his father, Greg; his grandmothers, Marina Glista and Marlene DeFehr; his aunts Carolyn McLellan, Joanne Luchenski and Kristin DeFehr; and his cousins John Paul Luchenski, Jada Piro DeFehr and Ben Piro DeFehr, in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of the constituents of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and page Maddie van Warmerdam, we'd like to welcome her mother, Anne; her father, Mike; her sister, Jacqui, who is a former page here at Queen's Park; her grandmother, Dorothy; and her grandfather, Peter, in the public galleries today. Welcome to all of them, and to a guest of mine who will be joining me this morning in the Speaker's gallery, Nancy Sanderson Swartz.

As well, happy birthday to a couple of members. Garfield Dunlop and Randy Hillier are both celebrating birthdays today. Happy birthday to them.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I do want to introduce someone who's on the way to the House and may not be here yet. The mayor of the great gold-mining town of Red Lake, Phil Vinet, will be here shortly, so let's welcome him into the House.

MINE TO MACE PROJECT

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg the indulgence of the House to make a short announcement. Later today, I will be distributing letters to all members referencing a special event taking place at the legislative precinct commencing next week. Members are aware, during this sitting period, that we have been using the province's first mace. This is because our current mace is out for a much-needed cleaning and replating in preparation for a special role in what we're calling the Mine to Mace project.

Some time ago, De Beers Canada sought to donate two diamonds extracted from Ontario's first diamond mine to the Legislative Assembly, and the concept of mounting these diamonds on our mace was accepted. The design for the diamond setting in the mace will include

one rough and one polished stone. The letter that I'm sending each of you provides more extensive detail of this Mine to Mace project and identifies the numerous organizations who have generously donated time and effort to it.

This is an especially exciting project for the assembly because the diamonds are to be cut at a site here in the legislative precinct. Commencing Monday in the north heritage room adjacent to the Speaker's office, a supreme master diamond cutter will be cutting and polishing one of the diamonds. This will mark the very first occasion on which a diamond has ever been cut in the province of Ontario.

Anyone who's interested is invited to drop by the north heritage room next week and view the historic event in progress. A camera will also be installed so that you can get a close-up view of the work being done. Once the diamond has been cut and polished and is ready to be set, it will be laser-etched with the number ONT-1-00001, signifying the finished stone as the first diamond to be mined, cut and polished in Ontario. The stone will also be etched with the Latin motto found on the assembly's coat of arms: "audi alteram partem." By way of digression, I urge all members to take note and commit to memory the translation of that motto, which is, "Hear the other side."

Upon completion of this project, there will be a ceremony in which we formally retake possession of the mace, which will now hold evidence of the ancient geological history of northern Ontario.

ORAL QUESTIONS

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Finally, after months of rather painful anticipation, after months of the Premier's Hamlet-like soliloquies about his desperate search for new and big ideas, and after poor Professor Florida was quietly hustled off the stage, we finally have the have-not Premier's job creation plan: a windmill in every pot and an energy inspector in every home.

Premier, do you really expect taxpayers to believe this latest fiction that further jamming up the real estate market with a new tax and an army of home energy inspectors is the road to recovery?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm always appreciative of the thespian qualities that my honourable colleague brings to his interventions in this Legislature—very energetic.

There is no doubt whatsoever that we bring a markedly different approach to managing the people's finances and growing this economy. We have, for example, invested billions of dollars in infrastructure, creating thousands and thousands of jobs. We're building new schools, new hospitals, new roads, new bridges, new public transit

and new border crossings, but they don't support that. They don't support the thousands and thousands of jobs that come along with that. That's just one example of the markedly different approach that we're bringing to managing the people's finances and growing the economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know that the Premier is doing his best, from the veranda of his Liberal-Party-owned Rose-dale home, not to lose sight of the status of the real estate market in the province of Ontario. Since your last do-nothing budget, Premier, real estate prices have plummeted by double digits. What did you do about it? You whacked homeowners with massive assessment increases while the values of their homes are in sharp decline. You ushered in a new era of a Toronto land transfer tax that can add as much as \$3,500 or more to the cost of buying a home.

Now you want to give beleaguered homeowners another good, old-fashioned kick in the pants with this \$300 energy reno tax grab. Premier, in this worst real estate market in a generation, why do you want to whack people with a new tax and make every home or condo exchange subject to the whims and personal schedule of your home energy inspectors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A couple of things on this score: First of all, it was in their platform. I just can't understand how they now decry a policy which was specifically adopted in their platform. When the matter was introduced as a subject of a private member's bill in this very Legislature, their members voted in favour of that, but now, in the face of a little bit of opposition, they want to turn and run from this.

First of all, it's \$150 all-in. Secondly, we look forward to committee and to hearing from Ontarians on the very best way for us to implement this. It's part and parcel of a big package to create jobs in the province of Ontario, which is exactly what Ontarians want.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, let me get this straight: The housing market in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario is in shambles, and you want to hit it with a spanking, brand-new McGuinty energy tax of \$300 or more, and then you want to delay home closings by at least a month, as the home inspectors do the work?

1040

The manufacturing sector has shed some 275,000 well-paying jobs due in significant part to your uncompetitive energy prices and you want to increase energy costs by an additional 30%. Did you bother talking to the folks who are going to be laid off in the construction sector, greenhouses, forges and assembly plants? You say you're going to hire 50,000 people; they're all going to be home energy inspectors.

Premier, why don't you just admit that it has nothing to do with job creation; it is simply a rough tool to plant windmills and plough wide swaths of transmission lines in neighbourhoods that don't want them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are a few things that we know, and I said this yesterday but I think it's worth

repeating. With absolute certainty, oil and gas are going to go up in terms of their costs; we know that for sure. We also know that over time the cost of electricity from wind, sun, biogas and biomass are going to come down. We also know that when we buy oil and gas from Alberta, we don't create any jobs in Ontario whatsoever, but when we invest in our renewables sector and put up those wind turbines, solar farms and biogas operations, that does create jobs here. We know that as consumers Ontarians are looking to better understand what they're buying when it comes to energy efficiency associated with their particular home. It's the biggest investment Ontarians make during the course of their lifetime.

We're talking about a big package which is designed to create jobs, attack climate change and ensure that we have more access to clean and green electricity. I think Ontarians are going to embrace this.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. Premier, if you owned a business that had a 41% increase in revenue over five years, but you lost some of your most talented staff, you made fewer products and you ended up deeply in the red, should the manager be fired?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's a bit cryptic, but I'll bring my own particular interpretation to it.

During the course of the past five years, not only have we revitalized our public services, restored confidence in our schools, in our health care, in our ability to protect ourselves by looking after the environment and things like meat and water inspection, we have also invested heavily in the growth of our economy by investing in innovation, in infrastructure, and cutting business taxes, by investing in partnerships with our businesses. Those are the kinds of things we've done during the course of the past five years. That's a good record. I think it's a solid record, and it positions us to withstand the present economic challenges that we're going through together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm disappointed the Premier found those results cryptic because, sadly, Premier, that's the Dalton McGuinty record.

Since 2003, revenues are up \$27 billion or 41%, chiefly through higher taxes and increased federal transfers. As John Tory and I demonstrated this morning, you took all that money and you blew it. You chewed up every last cent in one gluttonous spending spree and now the cupboards are bare. We have 500,000 fewer cars produced than in 2003 and we've lost tens of thousands of jobs. We had 19 northern communities operating in the forestry sector a few years ago and we are now down to six. Some 275,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs are gone. Now we find out we are heading for a record massive deficit.

Premier, you must have a few bucks tucked away somewhere. If not, is this not a massive failure—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, it's no secret we part company when it comes to how we should support public services for Ontarians and how we should put our weight behind economic growth.

As I said a moment ago, we've invested billions of dollars in infrastructure, creating thousands and thousands of jobs; they don't support that. We've invested heavily in the skills and education of our workers and we have 11,000 more young people graduating from high schools every year; they don't support that. We have 50,000 more people in apprenticeship programs; they don't support that. We have 100,000 more people in colleges and universities; they don't support that. We're partnering with innovative, creative Ontarians and we've funded over 1,000 research and commercialization projects because they are creating the jobs of the future; they don't support that. I understand that.

What they do support are continuing cuts to services that families have to be able to count on, like their schools and health care. We are indeed different in terms of our approach to public services and growing this economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier has failed Ontario families by blowing the entire \$27-billion revenue increase and not keeping any kind of cushion to cut taxes and make key investments when times got tough. That is an extraordinary failure of leadership.

Sir, you ran this province on autopilot for five years as Canada's once-dominant province drifted into have-not status and onto the welfare rolls of Confederation. When it comes to ideas to grow us out of it, you are the have-not Premier for moving us ahead.

Now, this week, we find out you want to close down more factories by hiking energy rates and gumming up an already ailing real estate market with a brand new tax and an army of home energy inspectors.

Premier, when will you finally act? Will you bring forward a new jobs plan and a budget immediately?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They also don't believe in cutting taxes. They say that. We're cutting them by \$3 billion for our businesses, but they don't support that.

We have done much by way of entering into new partnerships with Ontario businesses—hundreds of partnerships. Over \$8 billion worth of new investments have flowed from that, and we have some 9,000 new jobs. Again, they don't support that.

On the other hand, they tell us from time to time in the Legislature that they in fact want us to spend more on rural health care, they're going to eliminate the health premium—all kinds of irreconcilable positions they take on any one particular day.

We're proud of our record, and we are going to keep moving forward, protecting the gains we've made with respect to public services, continuing to find ways to partner with Ontario businesses, and we are going to move forward aggressively to build a stronger, greener economy here in Ontario.

POVERTY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians are confused about whether or not this government is committed to achieving a 25% reduction in poverty over five years. The new poverty bill, which was supposed to enshrine a 25% target in law, instead calls success dependent on “the sustained commitment of all levels of government, all sectors of Ontario society and a growing economy.” In other words, if conditions beyond this government’s control are not perfect, the 25% target gets tossed out the back door.

When will this government stop making excuses, stop creating escape clauses and commit unequivocally to reducing poverty by 25%?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I’m very proud of the new legislation that we’ve introduced in this House. You would have thought that the NDP, while they were in government, would have attempted to do something along these lines, but they chose not to.

We have put in place—and I know that my honourable colleague understands this—a target now. We have put in place a specific strategy to achieve that target. We have chosen some very real indicators that tell us whether we’re making success or not; we’re the first government to do that. We’ve committed serious dollars to ensure that we can make progress in achieving that target, but we’ve always said, as a government we can’t address poverty on our own. We’re going to need the help of the federal government, we’re going to need the help of community organizations, but we are certainly going to do our part.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier claims that his anti-poverty act is strong, but that is not the case. Let’s compare it to Quebec’s legislation, which was in fact put in place six years ago. Quebec sets an ambitious and concrete target; the McGuinty bill does not do that. The Quebec bill sets up a fund to actually tackle poverty; the McGuinty bill does not do that. Quebec has a citizens advisory committee; the McGuinty bill does not have that. Quebec requires comprehensive action on education, on incomes, on housing, on jobs; the McGuinty bill does none of that. Quebec requires action to address the causes of poverty; the McGuinty bill does not do that either.

So I ask the Premier: Why is this government putting forward a bill that is so much weaker than the one in Quebec?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my colleague has her own particular perspective on this, but I think it’s worthwhile considering the perspective of others as well.

1050

Here is what Sarah Blackstock of the Income Security Advocacy Centre said: “The Poverty Reduction Act is very significant because it acknowledges that poverty is not inevitable and that government can and should create policy to reduce poverty.”

Adam Spence, executive director of the Ontario Association of Food Banks, said, “We welcome this new

legislation as an important step forward as it establishes an ongoing mandate for poverty reduction.”

I have a number of other quotes as well, but the point is that I think a lot of folks who work on the front lines when it comes to addressing poverty know that this represents real progress. I think they know that they have a government that has put in place for the first time in Ontario a target, a strategy, indicators that we’ve settled upon, and we’ve put in place serious dollars to help us achieve progress. They also recognize that we can’t do this, as a provincial government, alone. We’re going to have to move in concert with our partners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would say the point is that this bill is thin and will not help people get out of poverty in the province of Ontario. So what we are doing is urging this government to hold widespread public hearings and seriously, seriously consider amendments to its poverty bill.

Beyond the bill, the McGuinty government has yet to show that it will make investments to really reduce poverty in Ontario. Anti-poverty groups have made it very clear: \$300 million over five years, as the government proposes, is not enough. Groups are calling for an investment of \$2.5 billion in social infrastructure and public programs in the 2009 budget as a minimum down payment to achieve the 25% target.

Will the Premier assure Ontarians now that serious investment of this order will be included in the upcoming budget, or would he prefer to list further excuses for inaction?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have not forgotten the poor in past budgets, and we will not forget the poor in this budget; I can tell you that.

It would be nice if we had some support from time to time from the NDP when it comes to initiatives that we take to support the poor. We’ve raised social assistance 9.3%; they voted against that. We’ve introduced a brand new Ontario child benefit that will go to \$1.3 billion annually—\$1,310 annually for 1.3 million children living in low-income families; they opposed that. We’ve raised the minimum wage five times; again, they opposed that. It seems that every time we introduce an initiative to help the poor, they vote against it. So I look forward to receiving their support when we present our budget in this House.

TUITION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Again, to the Premier: Today, a report was released calling for a 25% increase in tuition fees over two years. More than 70,000 Ontarians lost their jobs in Ontario in January alone. Youth unemployment has been steadily on the rise in this province. For anyone to say that the average parent or student in Ontario can afford to pay more for necessities is completely out of touch. Post-secondary education is a necessity. More than 70% of jobs require it. In fact, the Martin-Florida report indicates that, as well.

Each tuition increase makes higher education inaccessible in this province. Will the Premier guarantee that there will be no tuition fee increases beyond the cap already set?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for the question.

First of all, to dispel any confusion here in the Legislature, this was not a government report. It was a report by a think tank that came out. Of course, we welcome advice from all quarters.

I'm very cognizant of the fact that all members of this Legislature want to make sure that post-secondary education is accessible to all qualified students and that finances are never a barrier. That's why I was very proud that one of the key elements of the Reaching Higher plan was \$1.5 billion in additional student assistance. Through that, we've seen investments in student aid doubled; we've tripled the number of grants available to students.

I'm pleased to say that Ontario students receive the highest amount of needs-based assistance than any other province in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I was looking for the minister to speak about the cap, so I'm going to ask again.

The state of post-secondary education in Ontario under this government is like this: We're dead last in per capita funding nationally; we have the worst student-faculty ratio, not just in Canada but in comparison to peer institutions in the United States; and we have the second-highest tuition fees in Canada.

How much worse is it going to get before this government begins making the adequate, strategic investments that Ontario colleges and universities desperately require to prevent burdening students with higher tuition fees and increased debt load?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm willing to admit to this House that there are challenges in the post-secondary education system, but the simple fact is that Ontario has one of the finest systems of colleges and universities in this world.

We invested \$6.2 billion, the largest investment in 40 years. What have we seen? Some 100,000 more students in our colleges and universities. In a recent ranking of the top 100 research universities on this planet, four of them were from Ontario, with the University of Toronto ranking number nine. McMaster University, from the community that she represents, was recently ranked first in the country in research intensity, a measure of research income per full-time faculty member: an average of \$308,000 per faculty member.

As I said, we're going to continue to work with our colleges and universities as they move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Just two weeks ago, this Premier was hanging his hat on the knowledge economy with the Florida-Martin report, but we don't create a knowledge economy by creating barriers to accessibility

for our best and brightest in this province. The self-proclaimed education Premier and his minister should understand this basic, fundamental fact. Yet his government is systematically making sure that a better future for students and their families is out of reach financially. When will he finally commit to ensuring accessibility to post-secondary education doesn't include further tuition hikes and more crippling debt for the students in Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: We've doubled the number of students who receive student aid in this province. We've doubled our investment. We invested \$1.5 billion. We have 100,000 more students who have come forward to our colleges and universities. That's our record.

What's their record? Let me tell you about their record. When the NDP got into power, they increased tuition by 50%. They cut funding. They cut funding to post-secondary institutions and they eliminated upfront grants for students.

I'll put our record up against their record any day of the week.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Premier. Yesterday, you delved into the past. Let me refresh your memory further. You stood in this very House during the debate on Bill 118, the hydro bill, in 1991, and you said, "We have got to question the wisdom of the minister in introducing a bill in a recession which is saying to employers and investors, 'Here comes an additional tax which we're going to tack on to your hydro bill.'" Your words then, and now your wisdom, Premier.

During times of unprecedented economic crisis, when your own mismanagement has torn Ontario down and landed our province in last place economically, you have the audacity to whack Ontarians with yet another tax, a \$300 mandatory audit. They've been hit with MPAC assessments at peak price and they are dealing with job losses and income reductions, all while our province is trying to keep its head above water. How do you justify this? How do you justify sabotaging citizens at a time when what they need is leadership in government and not more taxes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: Certainly I want to credit the honourable member and his party opposite with instigating this very sound idea which is embedded in our piece of legislation. I know that the honourable member was a candidate in the last election and therefore ran under the Tory platform, and it said as follows: "A John Tory government will ... [require] home energy audits before every sale of a house—so that the market will reward homes which are energy efficient. This will be a signal to homeowners that they will get a return on energy investments in their homes."

On the matter of the cost, the honourable member continues to misstate this. Yes, indeed, we have said it's likely that such audits would cost about \$300. Already

the government has on offer one half towards that. And on important points of implementation, in order to have enough people certified to do this work, it will obviously take some time to phase this in across the breadth of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Number one, that was then and this is now. And number two, you love—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. As I reminded you earlier, I too need to be able to hear the other side, and I can't hear the other side right now.

The member from Thornhill.

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Mr. Peter Shurman: The other thing I say to the minister is, there's a difference between our carrot and his stick. Minister, your answers show that you've lost touch with economic reality. You have no clue what Ontarians are battling today, and you have no plan. You have shown no leadership. Your Premier has said, "... there is a direct correlation between Hydro's rates and our rate of unemployment in Ontario. As the rates go up, so will the rate of unemployment." Yet, you have introduced a pickpocket bill, one that will surely increase the cost of power, and your Green Energy Act attacks the last and, for most, the most significant investment of their lives. Justify pickpocketing taxpayers at this time, Minister.

Hon. George Smitherman: Mr. Speaker, I know you couldn't hear what the honourable member said: "That was then, and this is now." He has declared a big, fat asterisk on all of the policies they might offer up with the idea that those are for today, but tomorrow could be a whole new story.

At the heart of the matter, knowing how much energy a home uses is a very valuable piece of information. There is agreement on that. It was in their platform. It was supported in a private member's bill here. But everybody agrees that the current economic situation, and the circumstances for homeowners who might wish to sell their homes, is challenging.

Indeed, I've had the opportunity in this House and outside the House to say that as we move forward to implement this, we'll look for all inputs, from realtors, from the opposition, to do this in a fashion which is very reasonable. It will take some time to be able to do this on a standardized basis across the province and to have the appropriate array of people who are certified to do so. We'll be happy to work with the opposition on implementation details that give—

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

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Nortel has announced 3,200 more job cuts here in Ontario. EI claimants are up 30% year over year, with many communities up 50% or more. Over 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the

last four years. The NDP has a five-part jobs plan. Where's the government's plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's the plan the member voted against. It's the plan that made investments in places like Mississauga–Brampton South, Vaughan, Kitchener–Waterloo, Scarborough Centre, Newmarket–Aurora and in the member's own riding; made investments in companies like 2Source Manufacturing, 6N Silicon and Agfa HealthCare; made investments in companies that will leverage into larger investments. In other words, the government jumped in and jump-started these companies to allow them to jump ahead of their competitors.

Yes, the news, amidst all these consolidation battles, can be very grim for those people facing those challenges, but there are also some success stories arising from this, and it is as a result of a plan of providing strategic funds directly to businesses in areas where we're going to have economic growth. We've been doing it and will continue to do it all across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: We've done the minister a favour. We've laid out a plan that would get Ontario's economy moving again. We need an aggressive Buy Ontario program, starting with 50% Ontario content in transit and 60% Ontario content in green energy, as they do in Quebec. We need a massive transit expansion program, along with new roads, sewers, bridges, that not only puts people back to work immediately, but will lay the groundwork for jobs of the future. We need a \$10.25-an-hour minimum wage immediately to put money in the pockets of those who will spend it immediately.

The NDP has done its part. Where is the government's plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's the plan that the member voted against. It's the plan he doesn't agree with, I suppose. But, in fact, it's got a lot of the elements of what he just described: massive investments in infrastructure—we've seen that done under the McGuinty government—massive investments in transportation. Your leader, I say to the member, was against the subway expansion. He was against it. He thought it was a waste of money, I seem to recall.

In addition to the infrastructure spending, the plan includes direct injection of investments or loans to those companies meeting the criteria in areas of economic growth, those companies showing ingenuity and innovation—and they are growing. They're companies like Héroux-Devtek, Mitchell Plastics, Agfa HealthCare, Powerbase Energy Systems and Hanwha L & C. These are companies that deserve much congratulation and success for their innovation and ingenuity, and we will continue to partner with them and support them to find ways during these consolidation—

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

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, there is a common tenet for

those who make use of Ontario's trails and outdoor recreation areas: "Take only pictures, leave only footprints." Ontarians are now thinking about this rule in the context of their daily lives.

We now talk about an environmental footprint and how to minimize it. We cannot avoid waste; it is an unavoidable by-product of living in a society. What we can do, however, is minimize the amount of waste we create in the first place, reuse what we can and recycle, as much as possible, what's left.

Minister, the blue box program provides a great opportunity for Ontarians to easily recycle common items like paper, plastic and glass. Through improvements, even more materials could be recycled, and the program could be more user-friendly by making the program consistent across the municipalities. What is our government doing to improve the blue box program?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me first of all congratulate this member on being such a passionate backer of the blue box program. He's indeed been a leader in his own community in that regard. Let me also say that Ontario households have embraced the blue box program, because as a matter of fact, the targets that were originally set out by 2006 were improved to 63%, two years ahead of the 60% target.

But we could do so much more, and that's why we're talking to the waste diversion organizations and basically have asked them to come up with some new recommendations that deal with such issues as to how we can reduce the amount of packaging, how we can include even more materials in blue box programs and how we can bring greater consistency between the material that's picked up in different municipalities.

We want to also have the notion of extended producer responsibility be an integral part of the blue box program. We also want to expand it to such areas as industrial, commercial and—

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

Mr. Jim Brownell: Ontarians want to do the right thing. They want to protect the environment for future generations. They want to minimize the negative impact they can have on the world they live in. With busy lives and time constraints, it is important that the government make it easier for Ontarians to do the right thing. As the Premier has often stated, the environment and the economy can go hand in hand. We can protect our environment and create new green industries at the same time.

It is my understanding that there are communities in Ontario that ship recyclable materials to foreign countries like China and South Korea, where those products are turned into new products that are then sold back to us. We should be building green businesses and industries here at home in Ontario. Minister, what opportunities are there for companies that could fill that role and create new green industries here in Ontario?

Hon. John Gerretsen: That is a concern as to what happens to these materials, indeed, not only in Ontario but throughout the world. That's why we've asked Waste

Diversion Ontario to look at some of the concerns about where the waste actually ends up. We've asked them to track the material system. We've asked them to help us promote the green economy. We want to make sure that we are working towards that zero-waste mentality.

There's some good material in everything that's out there, and anything we put down in landfill sites eventually will have to be cleaned up by somebody. The other thing that's very interesting about that is that when we remanufacture from recycled materials, about 25 times the number of jobs are created rather than by simply landfilling it. We want to make sure that we can repair and utilize the material that we have so that it doesn't end up in our landfill sites, to the detriment of everyone and to the detriment of our environment.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, you understand that thousands of Ontarians with literacy problems are losing their jobs as we speak. In the upcoming provincial election, will you take a leadership role and advocate for increased funding for community-based literacy and basic skills programs so that unemployed Ontarians can learn to properly read and write?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the honourable member for his question. Certainly adult literacy is a great concern to all members of the House. It's estimated that we have about 3.4 million people in the province of Ontario who don't read and write at a level which would allow them to function properly in this workforce. As a government, we invest some \$75 million a year through community agencies, school boards and community colleges to offer a variety of literacy programs. I certainly thank those agencies and organizations for the fine work they do.

1110

I'm happy to tell the member that this year we have been able to give \$2.68 million in one-time funding to help with special needs amongst these agencies and organizations. We look forward to continuing to work with them as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Minister. As you know, basic funding for community-based literacy and basic skills programs has been frozen for over a decade. With tens of thousands of Ontarians losing their jobs every month, the badly flawed Second Career program provides virtually no assistance to those requiring help in literacy and basic skills. By your own ministry's data, there are 2.4 million unemployed Ontarians who do not have basic literacy skills for a knowledge economy.

Thousands of Ontarians are losing their jobs as we sit here today. Many will turn to their local community-based agencies for assistance in basic training and literacy. Can you inform the House that you will advocate on their behalf for increased long-term, stable funding in the 2009-10 budget?

Hon. John Milloy: Again I thank the honourable member for his question. I want to assure him that we will continue to work with the organizations and institutions which offer literacy programs. I do want to correct something, however, that he said in his question about Second Career: The fact of the matter is that we have ensured that Second Career has a literacy and basic skills component. An individual who comes forward and wants to seek long-term training through Second Career has the opportunity to do a literacy and basic skills upgrade of up to a year, meaning that they can actually extend the two-year Second Career program to three years. We are making sure that that program takes into account those workers who need that extra boost in order to enter into a retraining program and enter back into the workforce.

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Health units across this province do not have the resources to deliver the services mandated by the province. A third of the public health units do not have permanent, full-time chief medical officers of health and many are struggling to deliver the services they are legislated to provide. Minister, it is high time that you commit the needed resources to public health units. I ask, why is the McGuinty government neglecting public health, especially in this post-SARS era, and not enforcing its own legislated mandatory services?

Hon. David Caplan: If more than doubling the amount of funding for public health is neglect, I think the member needs a new definition of “neglect” in this province. Funding for public health has more than doubled, from \$233.4 million in 2003-04 to \$680 million in 2008-09. In fact the way public health, as the member should be aware, was previously downloaded was by New Democrat and Conservative governments.

Because of the efforts of this Premier and this government, we have uploaded the cost of public health from municipalities, increasing the province’s share for mandatory programs from 50% to 75%—a 96% increase in support to local public health and mandatory programs. In fact, the challenge the member mentioned earlier about full-time chief medical officers of health is a longstanding one. We believe that our recent—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I do know that there has been a significant increase in the funding of the public health units, but 100 residents who met in Owen Sound this week are still concerned about the services provided by the Grey Bruce Health Unit. The health unit has closed some satellite offices and cut nursing positions. They have cut mandatory services in family health, in reproductive health—including one close to my heart, the breastfeeding initiative. They have cut services in communicable diseases, including reportable diseases. They have cut sexual health and community injury prevention.

In January, the Ontario Nurses’ Association asked the minister to appoint an assessor under section 82 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act to investigate the status of mandatory services in the Grey Bruce Health Unit. My question is, will the minister listen to the people of Grey-Bruce and appoint an assessor?

Hon. David Caplan: I’m glad the member acknowledges that resources have gone to increase the funding for public health units—in fact, in Grey-Bruce, that the member mentions, from \$3,457,000 to over \$8.5 million. That’s a 60% increase in funding to this unit.

The Ontario Nurses’ Association and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union have requested to conduct a review of the Grey Bruce public health unit.

It’s not the practice of the Minister of Health to get involved in labour and management conflicts. I can tell you that it is the duty of boards of health to ensure the provision of health care program services, as required under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. Part of this responsibility includes setting priorities and determining the appropriate allocation of its resources.

I’m going to continue to monitor the situation—

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

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Culture. Minister, a vibrant cultural experience is quickly becoming recognized as an important contributor to a successful international city. In a recent issue of Foreign Policy magazine, the best global cities were ranked according to a variety of important factors, including the level of diverse attractions for international residents and travellers. This includes everything from how many major events a city hosts to the number of performing arts venues a city boasts. Only one Canadian city placed in the top 10 global cities, and I, like other members from Toronto, am pleased that Toronto was ranked 10th in the world.

Can the minister tell this House what cultural attractions helped make Toronto one of the best cities in the world?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I join with my Toronto colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River in celebrating this event. Indeed, I’m delighted that Toronto was ranked a global city. I think it’s really important to know that it was ranked the fourth-best global city for cultural experience, just tucked in behind London, Paris and New York. Toronto is in elite company.

The government’s \$123-million investment to renew six of Ontario’s cultural institutions really contributed significantly to Toronto’s cultural renaissance. The ROM Crystal has been named one of the seven new wonders of the world; an elegant new home was built for the Canadian Opera Company; and most recently, the AGO was transformed by Frank Gehry into an architectural jewel. All of this contributes to making Toronto a vibrant, fabulous place to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Minister, in the aforementioned issue of Foreign Policy magazine, global cities were ranked based on a myriad of criteria. You shared with our colleagues how Toronto's cultural assets helped the city score well. However, Toronto scored highly in other areas besides cultural institutions. In fact, labour-market mobility and the city's ability to integrate newcomer populations are seen as major assets in the global marketplace and a source of competitive advantage. According to Foreign Policy, people living in cities such as Toronto enjoy a high quality of life—and attract worldly people and offer cultural experiences to spare.

Minister, Ontario is home to people from all over the world, and many make Toronto their first residence upon entering Canada. Would the minister tell us how the Ontario government supports newcomers—and in your experience, is this expertise recognized around the world?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'd like to refer the supplementary to my colleague the Minister of Citizenship.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the minister for sharing the time with me.

Toronto, Ontario, welcomes immigrants. Since Confederation, countless immigrants have come to Toronto and called it home. In addition to bringing their language, culture and beliefs to Canada, newcomers bring their talents, expertise and investment.

Newcomers choose Toronto as their home for its strong business climate and cultural institutions, but most of all, its welcoming atmosphere, where diversity is celebrated as a strength.

In fact, during my time as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I have met ambassadors and consuls general from Ireland, Serbia, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Korea, China, Pakistan, India, Russia and Switzerland. Toronto is truly a global city.

I am pleased that Foreign Policy magazine—

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

1120

BUTTONVILLE AIRPORT

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I see a minister with his hand cupped trying to hear. I would appreciate all the members listening and being all ears.

Member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation. As the minister is aware, the future of a vital part of York region and the GTA is in peril. Buttonville airport, a key component of York's infrastructure, is at risk of closure due to an ill-considered Greater Toronto Airports Authority decision to cancel its capacity maintenance agreement, a loss of \$1.5 million annually to Buttonville. Without those funds, Buttonville airport cannot survive.

Buttonville is second only to Pearson International Airport in handling air traffic in this region and it in-

cludes air ambulance, police surveillance, media services, commercial cargo, corporate aviation, charters and private aircraft. As you see, jobs are at stake and so is a vital lifeline for York region.

Minister, what are you prepared to do to support this integral part of York and the GTA?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm glad the member asked the question and I thank him very much for bringing this to my attention. It was interesting that at the ROMA conference—the rural Ontario municipalities conference—this was raised with me. I met, at that time, with what I call the ministry's air advisory panel and that very issue was raised. This airport provides a very vital service for the people not only in the Toronto area but beyond the Toronto area, and I think it was an ill-conceived decision on the part of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority to end the subsidy which it was providing. Minister Chan as well approached me with this, you've approached me with this, the air advisory panel, and it is my intention, as a result of meetings I had, to raise the issue with the Minister of Transport of Canada, with a view to applying pressure to the GTAA to restore that particular subsidy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: In my view, these extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures, and I would like to think that the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, which runs Pearson, the biggest economic sinkhole in the airport world, would understand the integral piece that Buttonville represents to an already sparse Toronto aviation system. I urge you to review this file, as you've said you will, consider York region's growth and invest in the future of the central 905. Buttonville is very crucial to York's economic success, so I would ask the minister if he will commit to a multi-year contractual support agreement, either through his good offices with the federal government or from Ontario coffers.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know, since my friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook is sitting in front of you and asked us to save money and not spend money, you're probably suggesting that I make representations to the federal government, which has much more access to funding than the provincial government and has jurisdiction largely for airports, and I'm pleased to do that.

I think the member has raised a very good question. I think there should be a public debate about this. I'm willing to meet with the airport officials themselves to discuss this matter and I'm willing to go to bat, as I know he is, Minister Chan is, the air advisory panel of the Ministry of Transportation—we're all prepared to go to bat for Buttonville airport because we agree that it is a very vital transportation link here in Ontario. So I give him that assurance that I will pursue this matter vigorously.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. There's more and more evidence that something is critically wrong with MPAC property assessments. An analysis of 47 MPAC assessments in my own riding

showed everything from assessments that were 50% above where they should be, to 30% below. Premier, assessments that are as much as 50% higher than they should be will force seniors out of their long-term homes and away from family and friends. Will you finally admit that MPAC is fundamentally broken?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: As the honourable member knows, an increase in assessment does not necessarily mean an increase in taxes. That's the fundamental principle of the assessment system. The second thing is that the McGuinty government has brought forward a series of recommendations brought to our attention by the Ombudsman and we have implemented virtually all of those recommendations, as he laid out in his report. Furthermore, we also brought in a new system of phasing in the assessment increases over a four-year period so it is not as harsh on the individual property taxpayer. And finally, we did bring about a senior citizens' property tax grant program that the honourable member voted against in the last budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the minister: An increase in assessment almost always leads to an increase in taxes. MPAC is broken and needs to be fixed. But the extreme volatility we're seeing is present in any market-based assessment system such as Ontario's. The NDP believes that seniors shouldn't be forced out of their long-time homes by the arbitrary volatility of property markets. That's why we proposed our freeze-till-resale model.

Will you commit to freeze-till-resale today, or will you continue to allow seniors to be forced out of their homes by a deeply flawed assessment model?

Hon. Jim Watson: The honourable member's proposal would create this patchwork quilt where one individual with exactly the same house would have a completely different assessment than their next-door neighbour. That is not fair to individuals moving into a particular neighbourhood.

We also understand—because there is from time to time extreme volatility with the assessment system, that's exactly why this government brought in a four-year, phased-in approach to try to give some greater comfort to those individuals who happen to see a particularly high spike in their assessment. It's also why we understand—I have a number of senior citizens in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, and this government understands that we have to bring in programs that are going to give those people some help to allow them to stay in their homes. That's why we brought in the senior citizens' property tax grant. I would ask the NDP why they voted against the senior citizens and why they voted against the property tax grant program that helps the people that they purport to want to help.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is addressed to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As part of

its plan to improve emergency room wait times in our hospitals, the ministry has set provincial targets for the time spent in ER. Just last week, it started to report publicly the time that Ontario residents spent waiting, on average, in the emergency rooms of their hospitals.

This list, publicly released, shows that the Church Street site of the Humber River Regional Hospital, located in York South–Weston, has reported high wait times for patients with complex conditions requiring more time for diagnosis, treatment or hospital bed admission. Improving ER performance is one of our health care priorities. Our ministry has also very recently announced a \$109-million comprehensive ER strategy.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, how will this strategy help the hospitals improve their performance and help Ontarians spend less time waiting in the emergency room in their area?

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like to thank the member from York South–Weston for her question and also for her advocacy on behalf of her constituents. My honourable colleague is quite right: Improving ER wait times is a major priority for myself and for this government. That's why we launched a comprehensive \$109-million ER strategy. It's a strategy that recognizes that there is a multiplicity of factors that affect ER performance. The strategy includes nearly \$40 million for a performance fund to target Ontario's 23 poorest-performing emergency rooms with IT enhancement and coaching teams to enhance hospital efficiency. It includes nearly \$39 million for increased home care, personal support and homemaking services, and enhanced integration between hospitals and community care access centres. It gives Ontario's 14 local health integration networks \$22 million to invest in local solutions for their ALC pressures.

I'm confident that this strategy will deliver some great results for Ontario ERs. And because we're now—

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Improving emergency care does require making improvements across the entire system. These investments and initiatives in a number of areas of our health system will help to provide Ontarians with alternative options and help them receive the high-quality, prompt assistance that they expect when they need to visit their hospital's emergency room.

These investments also help our hospitals excel in a number of different areas. Humber River Regional Hospital, for example, is considered a bariatric centre of excellence for the services it offers to patients struggling with severe obesity.

Minister, the government announced this week that it will be improving access to bariatric treatment. Could you please explain what this expansion will mean for the residents of Ontario who require such services?

1130

Hon. David Caplan: I again thank the member for the question because, as health minister, preventing and managing the spread of chronic diseases is one of my top priorities. That's why I launched a comprehensive

diabetes strategy this last summer; that's a \$741-million investment. Increasing access to bariatric surgeries is part of that strategy.

We're devoting \$75 million over the next three years to increase bariatric surgery capacity in our province by some 500%. Humber River Regional Hospital, in the member's riding, is one of the hospitals that will benefit from this investment. Currently it has the capacity to perform 57 surgeries each year, but by 2011-12 it will perform up to 330 bariatric surgeries annually. Humber River Regional has been a bariatric centre of excellence since 2007. The centre provides pre- and post-bariatric surgical care, counselling, referral and weight loss treatment. The centre is delivering, by a—

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: To the Minister of Health: Oakville, as you will know, is one of the fastest-growing towns in Canada, and the current hospital is busting at the seams. Last June, your predecessor announced that there would be a one-year delay on the construction of the new hospital. To get that important project up and running as quickly as possible, Minister, will you allow the request for qualification of builders to go forward?

Hon. David Caplan: I know very well that Infrastructure Ontario is working with the hospital in Oakville, Trafalgar Memorial, to get this project on track as quickly as we possibly can. It's with tremendous regret that there was any delay, and it was simply because we have put so much work on to the market that there is a need to match up the capacity to deliver the project with the ability and all that's out there. I know that the folks at Infrastructure Ontario are working with John Oliver and the board, and we will be moving ahead with the requests, as has been laid out by Infrastructure Ontario, for qualifications—later on for RFPs. I very much look forward to working with my colleague opposite and with the member from Oakville, Kevin Flynn, to be able to get shovels in the ground and see that much-needed project delivered as quickly as we possibly can.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: That should have been done a long time ago.

Milton is the fastest-growing community in Canada and submitted a business plan for the needs of a Milton hospital expansion to your ministry last September. Your ministry has been sitting on them since last September, and they can't proceed with a functional design program until that approval takes place.

That hospital in Milton was built for a population of 30,000 people. The current population in Milton is 75,000 people, two and a half times greater. Before the hospital can be expanded, the population of Milton will be 116,000 people, being serviced by a hospital built for 30,000 people. Minister, will you approve the business plan for needs for the Milton hospital with all possible haste?

Hon. David Caplan: The member in his question says that these things should have been done long ago. I couldn't agree more. But unfortunately, when that member sat on this side of the House, he did not lift a finger whatsoever to get these projects moving ahead. Regrettably—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to listen to the answer, please.

Hon. David Caplan: It took Kevin Flynn and Dalton McGuinty and the effort of this government to get over 100 hospital capital projects moving forward. I'm very proud of that achievement.

I say to the member that I am aware of the pressing needs in Milton and in other places around the province. We are working with my colleague the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure as he puts together the next iteration of that capital plan. I know he has the support of the finance minister for a 10-year, \$60-billion infrastructure investment. I will say to the member that no decisions—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock NDP candidate Lyn Edwards is hearing from cattle farmers struggling with high costs, like surging feed prices, while beef prices are so low that they're being compared to the Great Depression. OMAFRA's program has supposedly addressed the problem; the Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payment program just isn't working. The program's eligibility criteria leave too many ineligible, particularly young farmers. Those who do not qualify receive payments that are far too low to get by on. Before more cattle farmers are put out of business, why won't the minister commit to expanding eligibility and increasing the safety net payment?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Well, I think that it's important to correct, for those people who listened to the question, that the cattle, hog and horticulture payment is not a program. It was a one-time ad hoc payment. We listened very carefully to our stakeholders, who indicated that because of some long-standing hurt in the industry, they needed some one-time help. We provided that to them. We used the same formula that the federal government had used previously for their federal cost-of-production top-up. By the way, Ontario was the only province in Canada to provide this type of payment to cattle, hog and horticulture producers. We know that other producers across Canada were envious of that.

Is there more to do—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Cattle farmers are hurting and they are worried about the future of their family farms—and the minister laughs. They need a partner in government to help share the market risk, to ensure Ontarians get

locally grown, safe, healthy and affordable food for years to come.

The NDP have proposed a grow-Ontario plan that would generate and guarantee farmers a reliable, bankable level of income year after year, a reasonable insurance plan for troubling times. Given that this government's program isn't working, why won't the minister introduce an insurance program to provide reliable annual funding to all farmers who are struggling to get by?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: What we have heard from farmers in the province of Ontario is that they want to get their money out of the marketplace and not out of the mailbox. That is why our government has invested in the Buy Ontario/Pick Ontario Freshness campaign. Farmers believe that when Ontarians understand, by preferring Ontario farm products—that will make farmers the winner and it will make the people of Ontario healthier, it will reduce their environmental footprint, and it will be good for rural communities.

We listened to farmers. This is what they said they needed. We have embraced it, and thankfully Ontarians have as well. There is now a greater awareness and there is a wave going over Ontario to pick and prefer locally grown, quality agriculture products from Ontario.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: During my answer to the member from Nickel Belt, I think I said \$3.4 million. In fact, it was \$345,000—I missed a decimal place—and \$850,000. I just wish to correct my record.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll take this opportunity to welcome a class that will be visiting Queen's Park today: Davenport Public School from my riding in Aylmer, Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: I take this opportunity to make a statement on Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. I'm reading from a letter from a constituent of mine, who said that Mr. McGuinty's Green Energy Act is taking away the currently legislative review process that allows input from individuals and local government regarding new energy projects. What will be next? This is a major step backward in our democratic rights. Who knows what will

be next on their agenda? He says: "I trust you will do everything possible to prevent this erosion of civil liberties. There is a right way and a wrong way for Mr. McGuinty to further this green plan. Let's do it the right way." This was in the Sarnia Observer.

Among a number of the other comments I had was—commenting again from a couple of articles, "Bill 150 is long on framework but short on substance"; "Solar power in Ontario will cost 42 cents per kilowatt hour." We know that existing electricity that's generated from coal power is around a nickel, so these people are commenting: Where's the price of energy going to go in this province?

In conclusion, the McGuinty Liberals have too many hands in our pockets. After this bill is imposed, if it is, people will say, "What's in your wallet?" Like in the Capital One commercials, again, the answer will be, "Nothing, nada, zilch, zippo."

TEACHERS

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise today to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the men and women who educate our young kids. These fine teachers spend countless hours making sure our children understand important subjects such as history, science and math, just to name a few. These teachers also educate our children on healthy eating habits.

Just recently, I was contacted by a hospitality teacher by the name of Lars Skjold-Petterson, who brought to my attention an important program that he would like to start at St. Roch Catholic Secondary School, which is opening up in my riding in September. Mr. Skjold-Petterson would like to make this school a "fried-free school." What that means is that the school cafeteria would not be serving fatty foods, such as french fries and pizza, and would instead be serving healthy foods, such as green salads and vegetables.

It's the responsibility of our government, our school boards and our local communities to encourage these types of initiatives. Our children need to learn from an early age to eat healthy. Healthy eating habits will only benefit them in the future.

I thank Mr. Skjold-Petterson for his enthusiasm and strongly support his new initiative.

ISRAEL APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. Peter Shurman: Prior to the winter break, I rose in this House to discuss Israel Apartheid Week because it was not then certain that we'd be returning here prior to that event. As it turns out, we did so, and Israel Apartheid Week begins on Monday.

I said that, as Canadians, we have a proud history of advocating for an end to apartheid in South Africa, and we condemn the human rights violations committed then. Trivializing that struggle by equating it with any action by the state of Israel is inaccurate at the very least and highly objectionable to any fair-minded Canadian, to be sure.

In Canada, we encourage informed debate because it may one day be the foundation for solutions to problems we haven't yet solved. Universities should be the heart of that debate, but never the site of physical intimidation or threat of violence, which we witnessed at York University several weeks ago involving supporters of Israel confronted by supporters of certain Palestinian positions.

Today, I call upon those responsible for security of students on all Ontario campuses during Israel Apartheid Week, indeed at all times, to make certain that debate is never stifled, that Canadian hate laws are always respected and that no one engages in physical intimidation to underscore opinions.

I also repeat on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, that I deplore any equation of Israel with an apartheid regime and ask for all members of this Legislature to join us in condemning Israel Apartheid Week.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today to speak about MPAC. MPAC is not working. Our property assessment system in this province is not only not working, but it's working to the detriment of many of our seniors and small business people.

We packed Swansea Town Hall last week with those who had problems with the MPAC system in my riding, and we're going to continue to do that across the riding. Next week it's going to be Humbercrest Public School, where residents are going to come out, bring their assessments, many of them up to 50% too much; many of them up to 30% too little. Clearly, the system is not working.

A wonderful man in our riding, a retired university professor and statistician, has done a very measured survey. He's discovered that in 47 houses that sold at market value, not one was correctly assessed by MPAC. We, in the NDP, are urging that this government adopt a freeze-till-resale model. It works excellently well in California and other jurisdictions, and would replace this fatally flawed system.

The minister today rose in this House and said that just because you've got an increased assessment, it doesn't mean increased taxes. I would ask, what does it mean if it doesn't mean increased taxes? Certainly that's what increased assessments mean for most people.

EVERGREEN HOSPICE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Last Friday evening, I attended the Evergreen Hospice Gala in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. The purpose of this event, consisting of a wonderful evening of dinner and entertainment, was to raise public awareness and funds for Evergreen Hospice and its important palliative care initiatives in the community.

First established in 1989, Evergreen Hospice helps residents of the towns of Whitchurch-Stouffville and Markham deal with life-threatening illness, death and bereavement. Various services are offered, including individual counselling and grief support groups.

Evergreen Hospice has long had a profound impact on the community. Each year, it supports about 200 active clients, and over 400 people attend its support groups. A non-profit organization, it has received funding from various sources, including grants from the Ministry of Health, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and donations from individuals, community organizations and businesses. Last week's gala and Hike for Hospice, another event I attended earlier this year at the Stouffville Reservoir conservation area, are also important sources of funds.

I wish to recognize the value of hospice services in the health care system, and I commend the tremendous efforts of the volunteers and staff from Evergreen Hospice, who make all their services possible.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: An Ode to Power:

Here we have the Green Energy Act,
Heavy in words, light in facts.
The cost to the people, not exact
Hidden taxes, piled and stacked.

The Premier says, it won't be a lot,
But taxpayers are wary and distraught,
Because they have not yet forgot
Similar promises, all worth squat.

Not long ago, we saw this show.
He said the coal plants had to go
He said he'd clean up Ontario
But then did nothing, quid pro quo.

Green energy, we all agree,
Will lead to green prosperity.
The problem is credibility
'Twixt what they say and what we see.

And what incredulous audacity
That the Premier, simultaneously,
Talks of reducing poverty
While slapping the poor with another fee.

Municipal leaders want their say
To represent citizens in a regional way
But they've been told to stay away
It's a power grab, plain as day.

And what other hidden agendas are here?
They won't be forthright, upfront or clear.
These are mysterious numbers as they appear
All doctored up by this shifty Premier.

The Green Energy Act, they call it "bold"
But we've seen it before, we know how this unfolds.
This song and dance is getting old,
It's not about green, just taxpayers' gold.

MINOR HOCKEY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a hockey team from my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. The Cobourg Scotiabank midgets captured the International Silver Stick championship in Sarnia recently.

I'd like to pay special recognition to the Cobourg Community Hockey League and the people behind the scenes who make things tick. It's important to take time to recognize the value and importance of these volunteers. Their contribution, along with all those of volunteers in our communities, makes my riding a great place to live. The selfless dedication of these folks is an inspiration to us all and their commitment has enriched the lives of our children and their families. Thank you for choosing to make a difference.

1310

Because of time constraints, I cannot name all the members of this championship hockey team, although I congratulate each player on their accomplishments. But I will quickly congratulate the coaching staff of the Cobourg Midgets, namely head coach Rick Palmateer, assistant coaches Josh Lewis and Wilf Venema, trainer Rod Curtis and managers Kent Adams and Ken Litton.

This team represents the best of our hockey traditions and they are excellent ambassadors for their town. I join with the citizens of this community and all the members here today in commending you for the energy and determination which you have invested in this championship.

I look forward to updating you in the upcoming months with further championship news from my riding as minor hockey playoffs wrap up across this great province.

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise in the House today to remind all Ontarians of what a wonderful place Toronto is to live, work and play. In our busy lives, we rarely take time to celebrate the diversity, culture and sense of community that the wonderful citizens of Toronto create. This diversity and sense of community is evident in various neighbourhoods where one can sample wonderful cuisine, hear live music, and purchase unique wares from countries around the world.

The size and scope of such a large city also present a unique challenge. The McGuinty Liberals have responded to these challenges through a strong financial commitment in a number of areas to make Toronto an even better place in which to live.

Some of the highlights include the following: Through uploads outlined in the provincial-municipal review, Toronto will see a \$400-million-per-year net benefit by the time the uploads are completed in 2018. Also, \$238 million through the Investing in Ontario Act will go directly into improving Toronto's infrastructure, and \$32.2 million under the provincial Best Start program to sustain and create 925 new child care spaces.

These investments underscore the McGuinty Liberals' commitment to municipalities around the province and to ensuring that Toronto continues to be a wonderful place for both visitors and residents alike.

CUPE

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Ontario is seen around the world as a beacon of acceptance, inclusiveness and diversity. These principles are the foundation of our prosperity and are reflected in both our legal statutes and our countless institutions.

This diversity is greatly reflected in our unions. Organizations like CUPE represent nationalities, ethnicities and religious denominations from countries around the world. Their leadership should not discriminate or exclude members based on any of these aspects. This respect gives them the ability to speak with a single and unified voice that unites rather than divides members in pursuit of workers' rights.

CUPE's recent announcement to boycott the state of Israel in light of the ongoing conflict and denounce contributions from select areas of study is personally concerning. It goes against the spirit of academic freedom they support and the union members that they represent.

CUPE has put its long-standing tradition of championing acceptance and inclusiveness in the workplace and amongst its membership at risk. These principles need to be respected regardless of one's country of origin. We can all agree that diversity is our strength and that our province is stronger when we all work together.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Colle assumes ballot item number 5 and Mrs. Sandals assumes ballot item number 23 on the list drawn January 28, 2009.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This Saturday, February 28, is the 10th annual International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. The goal of this special day is to raise awareness of the debilitating nature of repetitive strain type injuries and the ways to prevent them. As an avid athlete, I can attest to the impact that repetitive strain injuries can have on the body and one's performance. I can also attest to the fact that with appropriate precautions, they are avoidable.

Each year, we mark Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day to promote avoidance of such injuries, which,

while they may be not be life-ending, can be painful and life-altering.

At the Ministry of Labour and throughout Ontario's health and safety system, we use a broader term: musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs for short. This term describes injuries brought on not only by repetitive work, but also by forceful exertions, awkward postures, vibration and other physical causes. Regardless of what we call them, preventing such injuries is always better than trying to cure them after the fact. In fact, these injuries are entirely preventable. That's why the Ministry of Labour launched its pains and strains campaign back in 2006 to increase awareness of this type of workplace hazard.

From 2003 to 2007, MSDs resulted in direct-claim costs of more than \$640 million, and resulted in an estimated six million days lost from work. During this time, Ontario succeeded in decreasing the rate of all lost-time injuries, including those related to repetitive strain, by 22%. However, during this same time period, the MSD lost-time injury rate decreased by only 15%. Despite this decrease, MSDs accounted for 43% of all lost-time injuries in Ontario in 2007, up from 40% in 2003.

These injuries are taking a tremendous toll, both in human and financial terms. They are the number one reason for lost-time injury claims reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. They result in billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs to employers, and they result in untold pain and suffering for Ontario workers. We must do better than this, and indeed, we can do better.

Ontario workers and employers have a number of resources to help protect workers against often painful MSDs. The musculoskeletal disorder prevention guideline for Ontario and its accompanying resource manual tool box, and a website filled with MSD prevention resources, help to fulfill Ontario's commitment to reduce workplace MSDs. The musculoskeletal disorder prevention tool box released last year contains information sheets, sample surveys, hazard identification tools, and control strategies. The website contains hundreds of sector-specific examples of how MSD hazards can be eliminated or controlled through innovative designs and workplace practices. The guideline provides workers and employers with a framework for preventing musculoskeletal disorders. The resource manual provides in-depth information on implementing the guideline. It also provides information on understanding and recognizing hazards in the workplace that can result in MSDs and advice for addressing and controlling them.

These publications have been written by health and safety professionals like the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario, with input from employers and labour stakeholders. These partners are the Ministry of Labour, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the Institute for Work and Health, and the health and safety associations.

The Ministry of Labour and its partners continue to enforce workplace legislation, raise awareness of hazards,

produce resource documents, train workplace parties, and research the issue of MSDs and how to prevent them. The ministry's occupational health and safety inspectors focus on education and prevention during their workplace visits. Most Ministry of Labour occupational health and safety inspectors have received training in ergonomics. Employers are responsible, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of their workers. This includes protection from workplace risks that could lead to musculoskeletal disorders. Ministry inspectors and ergonomists issue orders under the act and regulations for ergonomic assessments and related preventive measures.

1320

In a few weeks, the Ministry of Labour inspectors will enhance their field activity with respect to MSD prevention by initiating an MSD blitz. This blitz is one of a series of highly focused inspections conducted under the Safe at Work Ontario program that helps workers and employers anticipate workplace hazards and correct them before those injuries occur.

Inspectors won't be addressing all potential MSD hazards in the workplace. They will be working according to specific guidelines. The MSD blitz will focus on tasks within the industrial, construction, mining and health care sectors with high risk potential for producing these MSDs.

We truly believe in prevention. Our government is committed to reducing MSDs in Ontario. Of course, there remains much more to do. One MSD is one too many, especially when you consider that MSDs are entirely preventable. In sport, play or work we must understand and respect the limits of our bodies. By optimizing our working conditions, we can maximize our true potential.

We must continue creating positive change. We must continue to promote a culture of prevention. If we work together, we can achieve our goal of a safer, healthier workplace for all Ontario workers.

HEART MONTH

Hon. Margaret R. Best: February is Heart Month, and heart disease remains the leading cause of death in Canada. As I rise in this House today, I am compelled to remind all Ontarians that more than 40% of Canadians will develop heart disease in their lifetimes. We can change these dire statistics. A healthy heart matters to good health. Every year, heart disease and strokes are responsible for one in three deaths in Canada.

Heart disease is preventable. In fact, 80% of heart disease can be avoided by being active every day, eating healthy foods, being smoke-free and managing stress.

During Heart Month and all year long, in fact, the McGuinty government continues to work on providing access to programs and services in order for Ontarians to improve their own heart health. One of our key partners in improving heart health is the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, a volunteer-based health charity

whose mandate is to eliminate heart disease and stroke through research, advocacy and the promotion of healthy living.

This month alone, I participated in heart health events designed to encourage Ontarians to have their blood pressure checked regularly and to be winter active to strengthen their own hearts. These are some key steps to better heart health.

The McGuinty government continues to educate Ontarians about preventing heart disease through the Ontario heart health program. These community-based initiatives focus on risk factors for heart disease and other chronic disease, including obesity, high cholesterol, unhealthy eating, diabetes, smoking, high blood pressure, physical inactivity and poor air quality.

To a great extent, many current health conditions are rooted in the way we live and the choices we make every day. As the Minister of Health Promotion, I encourage Ontarians of all ages to make healthy choices every day to prevent disease by raising awareness of risk factors, educating Ontarians about staying active and eating healthier and providing healthy initiatives. We continue to work toward improving the health of all Ontarians. Through supportive environments and access to education, information and services, people can make informed decisions, change behaviours and live healthy, more active lives.

The following programs provided by the McGuinty government support health promotion and disease prevention and encourage healthy eating and active living. EatRight Ontario provides access to credible nutrition information from registered dietitians through both a telephone- and web-based service. EatRight Ontario's telephone service has the capacity to serve callers in more than 110 languages and can be reached toll-free by calling 1-877-510-5102. Healthyontario.com is another valuable resource which provides Ontario residents with access to a wide range of high-quality information.

The old adage "An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure" is true. I can assure all Ontarians that the Ontario government will continue to provide access to programs and services to raise awareness of chronic disease prevention for the health of all Ontarians.

As I end this statement on heart health, I implore my fellow colleagues in the House to please take the time to have their blood pressure checked and to eat healthy, and, if you are a smoker, I implore you to quit smoking and to let us help you to quit. Your good health depends on you.

Now let us celebrate our hearts with good heart health all year long.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to respond to the minister's statement today on repetitive strain injury. I worked in industry and I understand the implications of repetitive strain. We had a number of people whom I worked with over the years, mechanics who worked in

the field, who were impacted by that. We've made a number of technological changes over the years. Also, I know a number of people who have worked in the office environment, and they've made advances with the mouse and with the keyboards to alleviate those injuries.

I think that any movement we could do to alleviate these kinds of injuries, whether it's an awareness program or opportunities to work with industry and with labour groups and to educate young people—especially the young people coming into the workforce. It's a little too late, maybe, for some of us who are a little longer in the tooth who have already had those injuries. We'll have to learn to live with them and hopefully not exacerbate them and make them any worse. But I think the young people who are coming into the workforce, whether we're doing apprenticeship programs or in the schools, programs where we can educate people or, as the minister suggested, where the inspectors will go around—and it hopefully won't be looked on as an onerous visit by the inspectors but an educational visit—they'll work with industry and with labour and with the owner-operators to make changes and improvements to the workplace.

So I look forward to working with the minister and our party on this side of the House to advance these kinds of issues with the labour community, with the office people and with business as well. I commend the minister for that statement and look forward to working with him further.

HEART MONTH

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to stand today and speak to the importance of heart health month as well, as my 6 a.m. workout today would attest.

In February, during heart health month, organizations such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation are hard at work raising awareness of the crucial importance of research and calling our attention to the warning signs that we have to look out for if we are to beat heart disease.

Interjection: Bob, were you there?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Yes, I work out, Minister.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wasn't. He asked me.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thousands of volunteers hit the streets, going door to door. While they are fundraising for money to cover research, they are also saving lives. This tradition goes back to Heart Sunday, which was a feature of Canadian life in the 1950s. February has been dedicated to heart and stroke research since 1958 in Ontario and it's now a nationwide month-long event.

The reason that heart health month is observed across Canada is the devastating effect of heart disease on Canadians. One in three deaths in Canada is attributed to heart disease and to stroke. Heart disease is a dangerous adversary that takes a Canadian life every seven minutes and it's an adversary that brings pain and grief to families and reduces the quality of life for those who battle it. Raising awareness of the importance of heart health means that the 80% of people who have at least one risk

factor—smoking, consumption of alcohol, lack of physical activity, obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and diabetes—will become more educated about the disease and may become proactive about improving their health.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and to thank the many heart health month volunteers who have spent countless hours knocking on doors—snowstorm or not, cold or not—to raise money for groundbreaking research which already has produced life-saving results in times past. We need to encourage people to take care of their health, to continue leading healthier lives and to continue battling heart disease.

Your dedication truly has saved lives in Ontario, and I join with the minister and speak on behalf of my colleagues in the caucus as well when I say thank you very much.

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MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In response to the Minister of Labour's non-announcement today in terms of repetitive strain injuries and musculoskeletal disorders, I have to say I was very much anticipating something from this government as the minister rose in his seat today, listening to him talk about the issues around musculoskeletal disorders in this province. I have to say, as he was rhyming off not only how these injuries can be painful, maybe not life-ending, but I think he said "painfully life-altering," I would agree; New Democrats would agree.

He said that the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries has actually been on the rise in terms of WSIB claims from some 40% to 43%. Apparently, we're going in the wrong direction when it comes to how these disorders and injuries are affecting workers in our province. So I was anticipating very much that the minister would come to the table today on this 10th anniversary—10th anniversary—of the awareness day for RSI or for musculoskeletal disorders, and what did we get instead? We got nothing. We got a reiteration of the significant impact that these injuries have on workers in Ontario. We got a reiteration of the government's claim to care so much about these workers, their claim to want to be doing something about it.

In fact, he says, "They result in untold pain and suffering for Ontario workers." The minister says, "We must do better than this." Minister, it's your job to do better than this, and what you need to do to do better than this is do what workers and the labour movement in Ontario have been telling you for 10 years. That is to put real, enforceable regulations in place in Ontario so that these injuries can be taken away from the workplaces once and for all. Injured workers have told you this for quite some time.

Musculoskeletal disorders are a bane in the workplaces of this province and they need to be eradicated, but they don't get eradicated, Mr. Minister, by using a "tool box." They don't get eradicated by sending workers

to a website for information. They don't get eradicated by unenforceable educational guidelines, frameworks and resource manuals. All of these things simply do not measure up. The bottom line is that it's time for this government and for this minister to recognize that, yes, musculoskeletal injuries—RSIs, repetitive strain injuries—can be eradicated from Ontario's workplaces, but only with a Minister of Labour who is prepared to put enforceable guidelines in place.

HEART MONTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will be responding to the Minister of Health Promotion's statement on heart health.

There is no question that action is needed to reverse the concerning trends of heart disease in Ontario. Heart disease is costing our economy billions of dollars each year in health care costs and lost productivity. Heart and cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in Ontario.

Released this week was a national plan to reverse those trends by preventing 25% of cardiovascular deaths by 2020. That would also save \$22 billion over the next decade. A nation wide strategy is important, but we also need a provincial program responding to local needs and disease trends.

Studies tell us that cardiovascular disease doesn't affect everybody the same. In northern Ontario, they are at 50% higher risk of heart disease than the rest of the province. We also know that people on social assistance have three times the rate of heart disease than people making a higher income. Our First Nations communities have double the rate of heart disease than those who are not First Nations. Heart disease does not strike randomly, so it seems that our strategy should be targeted.

What do we need first? We need a real poverty reduction strategy, one that comes with real targets and real investments. Second, we need a government that is willing to spend the money and make targeted investments to the communities that need it most. Third, we need to develop a thorough understanding of the social determinants of health and work to impact these. Social determinants of health such as poverty, housing, education, early life and social inclusion have a direct impact on the life of individuals. They are the best predictors of individual and population health, and they structure life choices.

Although I agree with most of the minister's statement, I disagree with her conclusion that "Your good health depends on you." All good health depends partly on the choices that we make every day, but those choices are under the great influence of the social determinants of health, and at the top of them is poverty. Let's remember that for every \$1,000 increase to the revenue of a poor Ontarian, you can measure a direct impact on an improved level of health of that person.

A real poverty reduction strategy would go a long way toward decreasing heart disease.

PETITIONS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents. It was presented to me by Carl Moore. He's a farmer and the former chair of Ontario Pork.

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

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

"To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

I affix my signature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present the petition.

IDENTITY THEFT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there is a reported epidemic of fraudulent loans involving notarized affidavits by/from loan-handling lawyers' affiants that claim debts will be carried by other people's credit worthiness and/or equity in property; and

"Whereas banks, financial institutions and lending houses claim innocence in that they rely on third parties to perform potential debtors' identity validation and financial due diligence in cases of loans and mortgages they approve on the basis of third party representations; and

"Whereas it is perfectly legal for banks to readily approve loans they consider financially risk-free using third party affidavits that make debtors of people who are completely unaware, uninvolved and never see the money; and

"Whereas, by way of example, people have signed their support to reopen a quashed OSC investigation;

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

"That an investigation concerning identity theft be conducted into banks', financial institutions' and lending houses' lending policies, practices and procedures (as per reopening OSC file number 20050316-17043) to identify weaknesses in the law and lending system procedures for appropriate amendments to the law to strengthen specific areas of responsibility for potential debtors' identity validation and financial due diligence that will safeguard people's wealth and equity in property from fraudulent loan applications, specifically in cases of third party representations using notarized affidavits by/for loan-handling lawyers that may benefit themselves and/or their affiants."

I am signing this and sending it to the table by way of page Emily.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's signed by a number of people from all over Mississauga, largely around the Square One area, where my colleague from Mississauga East-Cooksville has the privilege of serving.

"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'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and support it and to ask page Ashton to carry it for me.

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ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This is a petition from the Huron County Federation of Agriculture. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has

publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

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

"To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

I'm pleased to sign that and give it to Jacob to take to the desk.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a number of petitions from places like Sarnia, London, St. Thomas, Oshawa and Stratford regarding Bill 29 ending workplace violence and harassment in Ontario. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas workplace harassment (physical/psychological) and violence are linked to the mental and physical ill-health and safety of workers in Ontario; and

"Whereas harassment and violence need to be defined as violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and earnestly by employers as other health and safety issues; and

"Whereas employers will have a legal avenue and/or a legal obligation to deal with workplace harassment and violence in all its forms, including psychological harassment; and

"Whereas harassment poisons a workplace, taking many forms—verbal/physical abuse, sabotage, intimidation, bullying, sexism and racism, and should not be tolerated; and

"Whereas harassment in any form harms a target's physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

"Whereas Bill 29 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse to work after harassment has occurred, require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment and violence as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 29, which would bring workplace harassment and violence under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act."

I agree with this petition, sign it and send it to the clerks' table by way of page Arjun.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have a further petition in support of MPP Mike Colle's Bill 56, which reads:

"Whereas there are a growing number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities;

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

"Whereas a growing number of illegal handguns are transported, smuggled and being found in cars driven in our communities;

"Whereas impounding cars and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing illegal guns on the spot by the police will make our communities safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, a bill proposed by MPP Mike Colle and entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities."

I fully concur and I will affix my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from a number of residents in Sarnia-Lambton.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care should recognize the importance of rural health care in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network commissioned a report by the Hay Group that recommends the downgrading of the emergency room at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart (CEE) Hospital in Petrolia to an urgent-care ward; and....

"Whereas, as of today, many patients are already redirected from Sarnia to the Petrolia emergency room for medical care; and

"Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of this emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

"Whereas Petrolia's retirement and nursing home communities are dependent on easy access to the CEE hospital;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network to completely reject the report of the Hay Group and leave the emergency

room designation at Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and send it with Tariq.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’m pleased to read into the record a petition from Carol Wade from 16 Cameron Crescent, Toronto, Ontario.

“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 agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it’s about the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre.

“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’m happy to sign that.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from constituents from my riding from Apple Hill to North Lancaster, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks’ table.

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PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I move the following resolution:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should commit itself to reducing child poverty by 25% over five years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Berardinetti moves private member’s notice of motion number 77. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: After my 12 minutes, I will also have three helpers from my party helping me out: the members from Kitchener–Conestoga, Oak Ridges–Markham and York South–Weston. I also welcome the comments that will come from the two opposition parties.

My distinguished colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Honourable Deb Matthews, introduced new landmark legislation yesterday in this very House. That legislation is Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. As the minister stated yesterday, the approach to poverty will be a multi-pronged one. The Ontario government cannot defeat poverty on its own. Therefore, my resolution today calls upon the federal government to join us on this very important matter.

This is not a simple strategy but rather a very innovative one by our government. The bill introduced yesterday does not seek to appease any constituency. You see, Mr. Speaker, poverty has no boundary, no gender, no race. Poverty is neither Conservative, New Democratic nor Liberal—nor any party, for that matter. Poverty is exactly what it is—non-partisan.

We are faced with an option in this province to do something about child poverty today so that the next generation of Ontarians can be contributing citizens through opportunities for education, training and skills development.

Our federal and provincial economies are faced with extreme challenges of enormous proportions, and this means that society's most vulnerable would ultimately suffer unbearable hardships if we did not act now. When we speak of poverty, many notions come to mind of people enduring all forms of suffering, including hunger, susceptibility to infectious diseases, malnutrition and so on. The definition of poverty is no longer the classic textbook definition.

Poverty does have, however, one major constituency: our children. When you have no income, poverty knocks at your door in the darkest hour of the night. The horrible face of poverty is manifested by the lack of income, low consumption levels, unhealthy housing and physical living conditions, and lower quality of health care and educational opportunities. This is what a child faces when a parent has no income or a very limited income. This is the beginning of the cycle that eventually entraps society's most vulnerable in abysmal poverty. But we believe that Bill 152 will begin to pave the way forward for many to take advantage of new opportunities that will eventually reward them with the necessary skills that will make them contributing citizens to our province.

Our government is rising to the challenge of the times to act. It is the challenge of true and strong leadership, starting from the top, to address the question of poverty in our province. That is why the McGuinty government is making this a priority instead of doing nothing. Doing nothing is not an option. There is a real urgency now to act, and we have to act at this time.

My resolution calls for the federal government to act together with us, because no single government on its own can stop and solve this problem of poverty.

Let me provide some background to the issue at hand. In December 2008, the McGuinty government unveiled its bold plan entitled *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25% over the next five years. This comprehensive and multi-pronged approach realizes that poverty is more than simply income and contains strategic investments that plan to lift 90,000 children out of poverty.

The *Breaking the Cycle* poverty reduction strategy emerged out of more than 14 round-table discussions, consultations held by community organizers, and the town halls held by dozens of MPPs in various ridings. Thousands of Ontarians also responded by letter and phone conversations and through the government website.

Most importantly, *Breaking the Cycle* is a made-in-Ontario proposal that was developed in partnership with residents, businesses, community groups, front-line service providers and, most importantly, people living in poverty. This strategy is a made-in-Ontario plan, but one formed by successful approaches from around the world.

Provinces such as Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador; other jurisdictions, including New York City; and countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland have all implemented strategies that aim to make a decisive impact on poverty. In creating the strategy, Ontario consulted, studied and learned from them all.

This poverty reduction strategy builds on the government's belief that each child should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential, and it builds on the McGuinty government's record of investment in education, social services and communities across this province.

The McGuinty government understands that reducing childhood poverty is a moral imperative. It is also an economic necessity in order for Ontario to compete in the 21st-century global economy.

The *Breaking the Cycle* poverty reduction strategy goes far beyond previous proposals by establishing a clear poverty-reduction target. The strategy outlines a number of short-term and longer term indicators that will hold government to account and show our progress in reducing child poverty. The strategy uses statistical data to show that we are making a real, tangible difference in the lives of Ontario's children. This is the smartest long-term investment we can make.

Childhood poverty does not understand jurisdictional boundaries, and we need a strong, committed federal partner. We can only do so much on our own. The federal government has a large role to play in income supports and harmonizing services for improving access for those who need it the most.

We on this side of the House believe in a willing federal partner that is essential to reducing child poverty and poverty in general. We call on them to commit

themselves as well to reducing child poverty by 25% in five years.

We want all children to be able to reach their full potential, and we understand that education is a primary means for achieving that. The McGuinty Liberals are investing in children after years of Conservative cuts.

The government understands that strong, safe communities are a key part in reducing poverty, and has made considerable investments to improve the quality of life of each child growing up in Ontario.

Not reducing child poverty is far too costly. The Ontario Association of Food Banks' Cost of Poverty study shows that the federal and provincial governments lose between \$10.4 billion and \$13.1 billion per year due to poverty. This shows that it is a joint responsibility, and the federal government must work with its provincial partners to reduce child poverty.

While we recognize that other groups experience higher rates of poverty, and often for more complex reasons, that complexity requires tailored solutions. We know that we need to continue to view the issue of poverty from these perspectives as we move forward.

We all know that Ontario is stronger when all our citizens are at their best. That is why our government is proud of this poverty reduction strategy.

As I said earlier, the Breaking the Cycle poverty reduction strategy is a multi-pronged approach, and I want to highlight a couple of key points.

It will increase the Ontario child benefit to \$1,310 per child per year. This will provide support for 1.3 million children in low-income families. When fully implemented, the enhanced Ontario child benefit will represent a total investment of about \$1.3 billion per year.

Fully implemented full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is also part of our plan, and the initial focus is on low-income neighbourhoods. This will help children improve their readiness for grade 1, while helping more parents access additional child care and learning opportunities for their children.

Investing in community opportunity funds also gives local leaders support to coordinate community revitalization projects. We are investing \$19 million more annually in the crown wards success strategy to support kids as they leave care and transition into independence.

We are increasing funding for the youth opportunities strategy to give kids in priority neighbourhoods more access to skills training and mentorship programs. Nothing is better than having an older person, whether it be a father or a mentor, helping you to learn a new skill or some other way of working in the work environment.

We're investing \$7 million annually to develop a community hub program that will focus on using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement.

We're investing \$10 million annually in an after-school program that will support children in high-needs neighbourhoods with new programming focused on physical activity and wellness.

We're investing \$6 million annually to triple the number of parenting and family literacy centres to a total of 300 across the province.

We are funding the provincial rent bank program to provide temporary financial assistance to people facing possible eviction from their home or apartment.

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We will also undertake a review of social assistance to remove barriers and increase opportunities. We in this government want to make it easier for those on social assistance to enter the workforce. I think I speak for many, many people, because I have seen and met many of them. They don't want to be on social assistance. They want to enter the workforce, and this government is committed to helping them do that.

We'll also establish a social policy institute that will focus on evidence-based, long-term policy development and evaluate social policy interventions.

The McGuinty Liberals have already made drastic changes to improve the lives of Ontario's children. We've transformed our education system, with over \$4.3 billion in new investments to improve the quality of education for students across the province. We've hired 2,630 elementary specialist teachers in the areas of literacy, numeracy, physical education, music and art. Five hundred and thirty thousand students in JK to grade 3 now have the benefit of almost 90% of classes having 20 or fewer students. Grade 3 to 6 students' test scores are up 11%, and the graduation rate has increased from 68% to 75%, meaning that more students now have the skills to compete in the global economy.

We have made capital investments to create and repair up to 22,000 housing units, some of these even located in my own riding of Scarborough Southwest. I was at one of the announcements late last year.

We have increased the minimum wage every year for the last three years, reaching \$10.25 an hour by 2010. We've already created 22,000 affordable child care spaces, and this strategy will build on this success. We doubled funding for the student nutrition program in our first mandate and doubled it again in 2008 so that existing programs could be enhanced and the program could be expanded to more communities. We've increased social assistance rates by 9.3% after a decade of slashed and frozen rates.

In summary, we have done a lot and we continue to move forward with this plan. I'm calling today for the assistance of the federal government so that we can help those most in need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to speak to this poverty resolution. You know, a resolution that comes into this House and blames or asks another level of government to do something is really an admission of failure: that this government can't do the job that it was elected to do and that it promised to do.

So often, when you examine the poverty issue, there are health issues around the people who are in poverty in

our province. Our government brought in a number of acts and programs. Not the least amongst them was Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, which was one of the forerunners of those programs in North America. In that program, we examined, tested and identified problems within newborn children and children who were pre-school in age. It was one of the first programs in North America to identify autistic children. With that identification, we could either cure—hopefully—contain or treat those identified problems.

We also brought in vaccination programs and immunization programs. We brought in one of the first influenza immunizations—free flu shots for the entire province of Ontario. Anyone who wanted a flu shot could get it. That was one of the early—because you can't go to work when you're sick. It also helped to clear out a lot of the problems that we were having during the wintertime in the emergency wards across Ontario.

We brought in a newborn screening program which was about to be initiated when we left government. I believe that the current government did bring in that newborn screening program, which was based on the success of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program. We also implemented a very interesting program, a very effective program: it was called Ontario's Promise. What it did was link the private sector with the non-profit sector. For instance, the Royal Bank of Canada could be linked with the YMCA or YWCA. I'm not sure if that actually happened, but that's the kind of thing that program put together. It put together private sectors with non-profit sectors.

Its purpose was to achieve goals for kids. It was based on a very successful US program that was brought in and implemented by Colin Powell in the United States. Interestingly, that program had a budget of about \$2 million. That covered staff and the marketing of the program. That \$2 million raised over \$60 million from the private sector for programs aimed at children, aimed at getting children to understand what they could do and the successes that they could have. Unfortunately, that very successful and very low-cost program was cancelled by the McGuinty government in 2003, and it was one of the first actions that government took. Minister Bountrogianni cancelled that program with undue haste.

I guess all too often poverty is measured by welfare numbers. Again, I would point out that under the PC government from 1995 to 2003, 750,000 Ontarians left the welfare rolls. As we were creating 1.2 million new jobs, 750,000 people left welfare and got a job. In 1995, 1.38 million Ontarians were on welfare; 1.38 million Ontarians were on welfare out of a population of about 10 million or 11 million Ontarians. Along with the 11% unemployment that we suffered at that time, if you add those numbers up, about 20% of the Ontario population was on public assistance.

The only cure we'll find for poverty is a job. That's why training and education are so important, an education that teaches everyone, an education that is flexible and that allows everyone in the schools to participate in a

learning process. Training is equally important after you leave school. Being trained or retrained is a continuing lifetime process.

All too often, the government on the other side of the House talks about welfare. Welfare is not a cure for poverty. Under the McGuinty government, people on welfare have increased 22% since you took office; 22,000 people have gone on welfare under your government. And that is a sad tale under those good times. We have had good economic times up until last year, and yet welfare rolls increased 22%.

I would commend the member for bringing in this bill. It's to his credit. However, his government is not making the effort needed. And as recently as today, or last week, we saw that they're not committed to this kind of thing as they slapped another \$300 fee, another \$300 tax on the sale of houses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a privilege to rise in the House and to speak on the topic of Ontario's poor. The member from Scarborough Southwest cannot be blamed, but certainly the McGuinty Liberals can be. We had a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing yesterday when the Minister of Children and Youth Services stood up and said, "We're going to reduce poverty by 25% in five years," but there's no plan to do that and quite frankly, very little money too.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know that's not true, Cheri.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Education doesn't seem to think that poverty is as serious a problem as I do, but she'll have her time to speak a little later.

Here we have a situation now where the unfolding of the plan happens, where the member from Scarborough Southwest gets up and says, "Here's why she said this yesterday: because, in fact, we're going to go and plead with the federal government to bail us out on this one and to come in riding on their white horse and to pay for the programs that we refuse to step up and pay for ourselves. That is the plan. Somebody else will pay for it someday, as long as it's not us and it's not today.

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As I said in the press yesterday, this is more like a 5 in 25 plan, because at the rate they're going, that's about how it will affect poverty. In fact, the reality of the province of Ontario, unlike the halcyon utopia that the member for Scarborough West just delineated, is that we have more poor children than ever before—more poor children than under Mike Harris, which is saying a great deal—more poor children than ever before: one in six. That's the reality. In fact, those who are on ODSP or OW are worse off now than they were under Mike Harris. In real dollars, in terms of what those dollars will buy, they're worse off now than they were then.

Let's look at another marker. Let's look at housing. Those who are waiting for housing are worse off now than they've ever been. Some 125,000 families and counting are waiting on affordable housing lists in On-

tario, almost 70,000 in Toronto alone. Toronto Community Housing, government housing, requires \$300 million just to patch up the walls and fix the sinks. That's the housing stock we have. And what has this government done on the housing file? They promised 20,000 units. That was way back in 2003. What have they delivered? Even by their own markers, and those markers are highly suspect, they have delivered 6,000 in five years.

We contrast that with many other jurisdictions, and the member mentioned some. We contrast that with Ireland or Great Britain, or Sweden, which did 100,000 units per year of affordable housing. In fact, when you actually look at the affordable housing component, when you consider housing should be about a third of your take-home, and you look at people who are on minimum wage, ODSP or OW, we actually have about 300 new housing units built. So this government has done, on the housing file, virtually nothing—absolutely nothing, one might say—in terms of the other jurisdictions he mentioned.

What else? Minimum wage. You know, this really doesn't take a rocket scientist. We know that if you're really serious about bringing down the numbers of the poor measurably—they're big on measurement in the McGuinty Liberal government, without anything to back it up, of course—if you were actually to measurably bring down the numbers of the working poor, then a very simple way of doing that is to raise the minimum wage above the poverty line. That *de facto* would take about a million people out of poverty, just with the sweep of the pen and not one tax dollar. Will they do that? No, they won't.

Last year we asked for \$10 an hour. A huge wellspring of popular sentiment asked for that. That's the only reason they acted on minimum wage at all. This year we're asking for \$10.25. Why? We didn't pull that number out of the air. It's because \$10.25 an hour is just above the poverty line. If you want to get working people out of poverty, you have to make sure that you pay them above the poverty line. Certainly that's an easy first step; as I say, not one tax dollar.

One of the jurisdictions that the member opposite mentioned was Quebec. Let's compare what the McGuinty so-called 25 in 5 program does as contrasted with Quebec. First of all, they're investing less than one sixth of the amount of money in their poverty program: \$300 million over five years, which is an insult. It's not only too little, it's an insult to those who live in poverty, who are worse off than ever now, under the recession. Quebec's act sets an ambitious, concrete target for poverty reduction: namely, to become one of the industrialized nations having the least number of people living in poverty. The McGuinty bill does not. Quebec's act sets up a fund dedicated to tackling poverty. The McGuinty bill does not. Quebec's act sets up a citizen advisory committee to oversee and advise on implementation of the poverty strategy. Bill 152 does not. Quebec's act requires comprehensive action on education, incomes, housing and jobs; Bill 152 does not. Quebec's act

requires action to address the causes of poverty; Bill 152 does not. Quebec's act requires all ministries to review the impacts of new legislation on low-income people; Bill 152 does not.

In fact, our neighbours in Quebec have \$7-a-day, government-subsidized daycare. We know that children and women are the poorest people in Ontario, and we know that one of the reasons they're poor is because only one in 10 Ontario children has a daycare spot. The average cost of child care across this province is about \$1,000 a month—so try to pay that on minimum wage—whereas Quebec has \$7-a-day daycare for those women who need it. If this government was serious about tackling child poverty and women's poverty, which is poverty in the province of Ontario, then they would do something about child care. Bill 152 does not.

Instead, what we have is this plea today: "Please, federal government, please, Mr. Harper, bail us out. Please send us some money so that we can make good on our promise, because if you leave it up to us, Mr. Harper, we won't." Certainly, with \$300 million over five years, they won't. As I've said, that's the price tag for patching up the walls on community housing just in Toronto. That would take all of that \$300 million, and there wouldn't be a penny left for any of the other so-called initiatives.

It's sad. In fact, I would say it's beyond sad; it's insulting. It's insulting to those who are living in poverty, and I have many of them in my riding. It's insulting to sort of dangle this promise, "We're going to reduce poverty by 25% in five years," and then turn around and say, "only if the federal government helps us and only if the economy improves."

You know, those who fail to plan, plan to fail. The McGuinty Liberals are planning to fail. That's what the 25 in 5 plan really is: It is a plan to fail.

But, hey, guess what? Don't worry about it, folks, because when the failure becomes public it will be 2014. It will be after the next election. So, coming up to the next election, they can say, "Well, we're still working on it," right? A favourite McGuinty Liberal thing to say: "We're working on it." They can say, "Well, you haven't seen the 25% reduction yet, but just wait. Give us another term and then you'll see it," and of course, then we'll have another five-year term. We've seen this federally with the famous Campaign 2000, where the federal government sat down and said, "We're going to eradicate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000." That was a black joke, and 25 in 5 is nothing if not a black joke.

Unfortunately, the joke is on those who need the help the most: those who are on the waiting lists for housing; those who are struggling on 40-hours-a-week jobs to pay their rent and feed their children and can't, who have to go to a food bank even though they're working full-time. The joke is on them. It's a black joke, it's an ugly joke, by the McGuinty Liberals. It's a really ugly joke on all of those women who are waiting for a space that's subsidized in daycare so they can even think about getting a job. It's a very, very ugly joke on all those people of colour and recent immigrants who, again, are among the

poorest in this province. And it's certainly a very ugly joke on those who suffer from disabilities and who are on ODSP or OW. This is a government that said, "If you're disabled, if you can't work, you deserve to live in poverty"—because that's what the ODSP rates guarantee, at about \$1,000 a month. Try living in Toronto with a disability on \$1,000 a month. The McGuinty government says, "Do it; we don't care." It's a very black joke on them, because there's no increase in ODSP or OW rates in this so-called war-on-poverty, 25-in-5-bill.

We get very, very tired in this House of hearing these announcements and seeing absolutely nothing to accompany them. I feel sorry for all of those who were promised something. I feel sorry for all of those anti-poverty activists, those housing activists, those daycare activists, who hear the hoopla and then get the bill, who hear the hoopla and then see that what's contained in this 25-in-5 bill is nothing; just a plea, as we hear today, to the federal government to come save us from ourselves; just a prayer, really, from the McGuinty government that the economy will improve somehow, even though they're doing nothing to help that, and maybe they'll get a job.

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No more talk, no more photo ops, no more pleas to the feds, no more prayers for a better economy from somewhere; what the poor in the province of Ontario need, what the cry is that they need, is action. And action requires commitment, and commitment requires money. Neither commitment nor money is on the table, either with the first 25-in-5 bill or with the member from Scarborough Southwest.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise in support of the resolution put forward by my colleague from Scarborough Southwest that "the government of Canada should commit itself to reducing child poverty by 25% over five years." It's an opportunity for the federal government to get involved.

I want to speak to you today as a member of provincial Parliament, as an educator of over 20 years, as a high school principal who has lived the effects of poverty on our youth, and I want to speak to you as a parent.

We believe that each child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. So we call on the federal government today to partner, to join in this opportunity.

I'd like to go over some of the things that are happening right now. The action is occurring, and any member who is not aware of action that is occurring in this province needs to go back and do a little bit of research.

Right now, we are working on fully implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. What that means is, our initial focus will be on low-income neighbourhoods. For any of us, as parents, as educators, who have worked in schools in low-income neighbourhoods, we know how essential and crucial this is. The federal government has the opportunity to join with us in this opportunity. We can help students to increase their readi-

ness for grade 1 and allow more parents more access to child care in this province.

Right now, this McGuinty government is investing \$19 million more annually in the crown wards success strategy. I'd just like to take a minute to give you an anecdote of what happened in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga last week. We had a wonderful crown wards announcement. When I got to child services, the room was full of colleagues that I've worked with for 20 years—child and youth workers, support workers—and of course, the youths themselves.

What this means is that the McGuinty government is supporting youth who need to make the transition out of care, crown wards who in the past have not had the support, so as principals in schools, we have really had a difficult time in trying to support these youths in their transition.

There were dark days in the Conservative government, and I was in the schools during those dark days, but that's not what this is about. This is about looking forward, about where we are now, how far we've come in the last five years and celebrating an opportunity for the federal government to participate in this exciting investment in our schools, in our children and in our youth.

We have invested \$10 million annually, as we heard from the member from Scarborough Southwest, in after-school programs. What this does is it engages students after school. It engages them in health and physical activity. It engages parents. It engages families. What it does is it keeps the youth focused, it keeps them out of trouble, and it creates safer and healthier communities.

I'm sharing my time with the member from Oak Ridges–Markham and the member from York South–Weston, so I have to be conscious of my time. I did want to leave you with a quote, and this one comes from Kissinger, who said, "The challenges before us are monumental." Should we not accept these challenges, we will fall into chaos, anarchy and disorder. Should we decide to accept these challenges, we have the opportunity to shape a new world order. It is imperative that the federal government take the challenge, accept the opportunity to stand side by side with the McGuinty government in Ontario and accept the opportunity to reduce poverty by 25% in five years in order to shape a new world order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to support this resolution brought by our colleague from Scarborough Southwest.

There's no question that the McGuinty government is serious about reducing poverty in this province—and has been so well-detailed by my colleagues on our side of the House as to what we have done and what we intend to do.

My riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, on the surface, might look like a fairly affluent area of the province, and when you look at average household income, those numbers are certainly more than the Ontario provincial

average. However, when one delves deeper—and I just met with some advocates working in the children’s mental health field who informed me of the levels of child poverty in our own riding: In Markham, 16.2% of children are living in poverty; 14.3% in Richmond Hill. These are the statistics that were presented to Minister Matthews when she did her consultation in relation to the poverty strategy, which has led to Bill 152, and she took those extremely seriously—and we know full well that this government is committed to the course of action that she laid out yesterday.

I am particularly interested in the area of poverty as it relates to health. Poverty is a major determinant of health. There are so many studies that show that the poorer you are, the poorer your health is likely to be. They have shown, through epidemiological studies, over and over, that the poor suffer more low birth-weight babies in their families. There was a major study done in Britain looking at heart disease in senior administrators in the civil service versus those who were at lower levels of income in that civil service, and literally there was a gradient in terms of heart disease, with the poorer clearly suffering more cardiovascular disease, even after they corrected for such items as smoking. There is no question that a high-income earner who smokes has a far lower risk of heart disease than a manual labourer who smokes. So, clearly, there are major issues in terms of an investment in reducing poverty that will pay back in terms of better health for our population.

One of the programs that I am particularly enthused about that our government has committed to is the one that invests \$10 million annually in an after-school program that will support children in high-needs neighbourhoods with new programming focused on physical activity and wellness. This type of initiative will pay dividends. We’ve already, of course, doubled funding for the student nutrition program in our first mandate; doubled it again in 2008 so that existing programs will be enhanced and the program will be expanded to many more communities.

So it is quite obvious that we are committed. We ask the federal government to join us in our commitment. My federal counterpart in my riding is a member of the Harper government, and since his election, we have pledged to work together for the betterment of our communities. Whether it be infrastructure investment or this initiative, I call on those members of the Harper government to join with us in reducing child poverty and poverty in general.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I’m glad to join the debate in support of the motion brought forward by my honourable colleague from Scarborough Southwest.

Our government has introduced Ontario’s poverty reduction strategy, guided by a vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario. Our focus is on breaking poverty’s intergenerational cycle.

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This vision is particularly close to my heart. The riding that I represent, York South–Weston, is home to a large number of hard-working newcomers, seniors who have contributed to our society throughout their lives, and families of various structures and dynamics, all of whom desire and deserve to live with dignity and participate in a prosperous and healthy society.

According to leading economists and social advocates, poverty costs every household in Ontario between approximately \$2,300 and \$2,900 every year—every household. Poverty costs us all. It equals lost productivity and lost tax revenue. It means higher costs for social assistance, for health care and for the justice system. But the biggest cost is the loss of human potential.

That’s why our government is working toward building a solid foundation. That’s why we’ve introduced the Ontario child benefit. We continue to lower class sizes. We have quadrupled the support of school breakfast and lunch programs. We’ve been increasing the minimum wage since 2003, growing to a 50% increase by next year. We’re changing social assistance rules. And we are continuing to add child care spaces.

Childhood poverty does not understand jurisdictional boundaries. We need a strongly committed federal partner.

Today, I would like to share some of the concerns of some of my constituents who have written to me recently about the importance of providing child care.

Jeanette Machado, for example, writes: “You have the ability to work towards persuading the federal government to help better fund child care centres. Help make them aware of how important zero to six is, in the lives of children.” She goes on to say, “As a Canadian I value the rights of families and their children. I think the Canadian government has put them aside.”

Michelle Armstrong, another constituent, states in her letter: “The federal government must implement a leadership policy and funding role to resume significant direct funding towards child care in the form of fee subsidies....” She continues: “Working families need to have a safe, healthy, nurturing environment for their children.”

A willing federal partner is essential to reducing poverty. It is essential to improving the lives of Ontario children. We call on the federal government to commit and join us in reducing poverty by 25% in five years.

I commend my colleague for bringing forward this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I’m pleased to rise and make a few comments on this motion. There are a couple of things.

To begin with, the federal Harper government has only been in power for three years, and yet this government is now in their sixth year in power. I’m curious why we didn’t see a resolution like this when there was a Martin/Chrétien government. It seems odd that now that there’s a federal Conservative government in Ottawa they

would want to pick on this government, and they did not do anything with all the time they had to work with the Martin/Chrétien government.

I will say, though, in fairness to the federal government, that they do in fact fund the Early Years money. All the Early Years money that flows into all of our centres across the province is federal money. I can tell you that there may in fact be a need for more money in that area. The satellite office that we had in Innisfil is now closed down. They begged the McGuinty Liberals to put more money into the Early Years centre in that particular area because of the growth of the area, and no money came forward, so they had to close it down. So I agree that maybe the federal government could be more involved, and I would look to some positive debate on this.

But you know what? This government here, the McGuinty Liberals, have had a lot of opportunities in the past six years to make a positive movement in child poverty, and they're just now getting on the bandwagon.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Berardinetti, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I wanted to thank all those who participated in today's debate. Two minutes is not adequate to be able to respond to all the comments made, but I wanted to thank the members who did speak today and just close with a couple of thoughts.

There is an old saying that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in times of crisis and moral obligation retain their neutrality. We cannot afford today, in this day and age, to stay neutral. I think the government has made it clear that we are taking a stand, we are taking a position and we're not going sit on the fence. We're going to move forward with a plan, in spite of all the criticism that might come our way. This is a good plan. It's well thought out. The bill introduced yesterday—I was present when it was introduced—is a good bill and will put us on the right path to reducing child poverty.

I also wanted to say one more thing, and that is, we as Liberals maintain certain values that we believe in. I just want to say that generally speaking, when someone defines a value, a value is something that you see as being important in your life or in your dealings in life. You put a high value on something that you think is ethically good and a low value on something that you think is ethically bad. We have made a very strong decision here in this government that this reduction strategy is something of high value. Therefore, what we're doing is, we're not telling the federal government, "You do it as well." We're asking the federal government, "Please join us as partners." I'm sure we'll also ask the municipal government here in Toronto and throughout Ontario to join in as well, because in the final analysis, unless all three levels work together and even perhaps some outside groups work together on this issue, it will never be solved. No one government, no one person, no one individual, will ever be able to solve it.

Again, the resolution is a simple one: that the federal government assist us in reducing child poverty by 25% in the next five years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. And for those in the galleries watching and those at home watching on television, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 100 minutes' time.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should provide adequate funding to community-based literacy and basic skills programs so that the agencies can properly address the growing enrolment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Dunlop moves private member's notice of motion number 75. Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very pleased to be here today to participate in this debate. It's something that's very, very important to me.

I'd like to thank, first of all, all of the stakeholders who are with us today. They may not all be here yet, but I know we do have some people from the Midland Area Reading Council, the Ontario Literacy Coalition, the Toronto Adult Students Association and the ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. They're all in the House. As well, we have joining us Mrs. Susan Nielsen, the North American regional Vice-president of the International Council for Adult Education. We have a number of people from the Ontario Literacy Coalition who are interested in this motion.

People are probably asking why I would bring a motion like this forward. The reality is, I've got some stakeholders in my riding, particularly the Midland Area Reading Council, who are here today with the executive director, Sue Bannon, with whom I've worked very closely since becoming an MPP, but have taken a more active role since I've seen some of the real issues they face.

When I talk about this today, when I talk about increased funding, I'm not talking about just the community-based funding. I want the government to take a serious look at the whole program of literacy and how we can help our post-secondary educators, as well as our colleges. But the people who are really, really feeling the pinch right now are the community-based organizations.

I can tell you that in order to have about 115 learners in their organization right now—and most of the learning is provided by volunteers in our communities—these groups operate on funding of about \$60,000 a year. That's for staff time, hydro, heat, computers—\$60,000. So basically they're poverty organizations as we would stand today. In order to raise money to pay staff, they have to do things like fundraising, having hockey games, celebrity hockey games. I know I act as a referee at some of the games. They have Books for Brunch, where people pay to have breakfast so they can buy a book. They have

spelling bees. In Orillia, they have a snowmobile ride for fun, where people pay and pledge money on a snowmobile run in the middle of the winter.

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I tried to ask the minister a question today—and of course that's why we call it question period. We don't call it answer period. You never get an answer from this guy on anything. I asked him about base funding. Most of these organizations have not had any increases in at least 10 years.

Why the importance today of literacy? First of all, we are losing, I suspect, close to 300,000 manufacturing jobs in this province today, and they are included in a number of ridings across the province of Ontario, some of them in mine. First of all, when someone loses their job, that's one thing. It's very, very devastating. But when they go to try to fill out a resumé or apply for another job and they can't properly do a resumé or read or write because they've been busy doing their work and raising their family and paying taxes, that's a second blow to those people. I think that we have to do more for them. I know that the minister brags about the Second Career program and all the wonderful things they are doing there. We all know that it has been a dismal failure. They're going into the community colleges and the school boards, asking them, "Can you find anybody to help us put our numbers up?" That's actually what's happening as we speak here today. We have to get back to the very root and start funding some of the community-based organizations and actually teaching people how to read and write.

I want to talk a little bit about the statistics because I have some here; I thought it would be important. One was: There are 111 of these agencies in the province of Ontario. Many of you may have never been contacted by them because they work silently; they're run mostly by volunteers. But you know what? In the fiscal year 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, they looked after almost 40,000 learners in our province. Those would come into categories. Level 1s and 2s would be done by the community-based agencies; level 3s, mostly by school boards; level 4s, school boards and colleges; and level 5s would be done mostly by the colleges. In a lot of cases there are discrepancies, and there definitely are overlaps in this area. The total hours of service by volunteers, if you can imagine this, just to help people read and write in this province: 265,000 hours last year—that's what it was. And it was, of course, about equal time for the people who were learning.

There was a wonderful article—and I'm going to read as much of it as I can, but I wanted to take a couple of minutes—done by the Ontario Literacy Council in response to some articles done by Carol Goar of the Toronto Star. I would like to read part of this article.

"Carol Goar's article ('Put Education Focus on ABC not Ph.D.') highlights what those working in adult literacy and upgrading programs have long known. Research supports the argument that higher literacy brings sustainable gains to individuals, businesses, econ-

omy, society and democracy. Raising literacy helps alleviate a wide range of socio-economic problems, least of which is poverty. There is not one single issue that can have such a far-ranging impact.

"According to the TD report Literacy Matters, raising literacy scores even by one level could create as many as 800,000 additional jobs." You've got the Premier bragging about trying to create 50,000 jobs with the Green Energy Act that he is pulling out of the air. Here's a study that has proven 800,000 jobs. "It could lower the national unemployment rate by more than 1 percentage point. Statistics Canada found that lifting literacy scores by 1% boosts labour productivity by 2.5% and raises output per capita by 1.5%. Raising literacy scores to an adequate level could create a payoff of \$80 to \$100 billion." That is how important this is.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you something. This is a huge issue. Just since I put this small motion on the floor of this House on the 17th, through the help of Sue Bannon at the Midland Area Reading Council, who has e-mailed this across the province, we have had contact from across the country from professors, from universities, from colleges, from school boards, all saying, "Right on. You're on the right track." Second Career is not the way to go right now. It's a workable program, but we have to start at the basics, which is literacy, and I want to expand upon that.

I wanted to show you the kind of letter we're also getting. I know we don't have a lot of time here, but most of these agencies have written back to me. Here's a letter they sent to Mr. Milloy. This is one from Action Read, and it says:

"Dear Minister Milloy

"I am contacting you on behalf of the board of directors of the Action Read Community Literacy Centre in Guelph, Ontario, with regard to MPP Garfield Dunlop's motion requesting funding for community-based literacy and basic skills programs.

"The board of directors of Action Read is very grateful to the government of Ontario for the core funding that Action Read receives for operating numerous literacy and basic skills programs. The board of directors is also strongly in support of MPP Dunlop's motion. We would like to note that there has been no increase in core funding to community-based literacy programs by the government of Ontario in 10 years even though program costs continue to rise. This means that community-based literacy organizations have been challenged to seek funding elsewhere. This funding is often short-term and project based, with funds being allocated to specific objectives."

I'm only halfway through, but I just wanted to point out that I probably have 75 of these now from different agencies across the province.

Finally I'd like to talk a little bit, because we're down to a few minutes here, about the kind of money the government of Canada, these terrible people who we just heard a few minutes ago need to do more about child poverty—the kind of money they have received just

recently. I have the press releases. First of all, just so everyone knows, under the original labour market agreement, effective last year, on April 1, 2008, the government of Ontario received an additional \$311 million from the federal government, and it went directly to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Not one cent has come back to community-based programs. Second of all, the agreement last year, the money that they used for the Second Career program—there was an additional \$1.2 billion that the government brags about. The \$1.2 billion from the federal government is over a six-year period. The amount of money the Ontario government received on April 1 last year was another \$196 million. So if you put the \$311 million and the \$196 million together, it's almost half a billion dollars in additional funding that has come to the government for training, colleges and universities.

I have to tell you that one of the key areas—it's right in the press release that the minister signed, and obviously the government of Ontario agreed to it. It says right here:

“Foundation skills training and supports: Improve access to literacy and essential skills training, ensure availability of foundation skills training tailored to specific trades and occupations, and create new opportunities for foundation skills training in the workplace.”

What it boils down to, because we're down to just a minute and 43 seconds here, is that the government of Ontario has received a lot of money. One of the things that is very disturbing is that these community-based literacy organizations have even been denied a meeting with the minister. He won't even meet with them to talk about this. He's ignored them. He's disregarded the work they do. Today in the House he thanked them for the great work they do, but you'd think if he thanked them and he appreciated it, he'd at least meet with the main organizations, the key stakeholders, to talk about funding. It's been 10 years since they've had any increase in funding and it's time we did that. That's the purpose of this motion.

The reality is that if the government members are going to support this—I hope that you do support it; I wish you would—they will at least come back and ask the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to include it in the budget. We all know how many jobs have been lost in Ontario. You heard the TD report on how we can improve upon that, how we can actually do more work with literacy and basic skills and improve the workforce, beginning at the bottom and working up.

I'm looking forward to the comments from the government members and the NDP. I hope everyone in this House will support this resolution. It's a good thing for the province of Ontario and it's a good thing for those people who slipped through the cracks early in their careers. But now, with the huge loss of manufacturing jobs, it's coming to attention a lot more through all these organizations. I know already that a lot of the agencies could double their numbers this coming year.

Thank you very much, everyone, for the opportunity to say a few words. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's certainly my pleasure to rise in support of the member's motion that speaks to the need to fund basic literacy and skills programs in the province of Ontario.

Interestingly enough, when I first finished my degree in university, one of the things I did was to work with our local labour council in Hamilton, with several of our professors in the labour studies program at McMaster, to put together an English and literacy in the workplace program in Hamilton.

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The reason we did that at the time was not dissimilar to what's happening in these times. There was a significant downturn in the economy. Hundreds, if not thousands, of workers in the Hamilton area were seeing their traditional manufacturing jobs walk out the door.

Many of these folks had applied for their jobs right out of—in some cases not even high school; in some cases they didn't finish high school. At that time there wasn't a necessity to fill out reams of application forms. It was quite easy to get a job 30 years prior, 25 years prior, even 20 years prior to when this economic downturn was taking place in the 1980s.

What was happening was that people were getting laid off and were then in the position of having to start the job search process. You cannot do a job search process if you can't fill out an application form. You can't write a resumé; you can't read the newspaper. You can't do some of the basic things that are fundamentally necessary in job search if you don't have the literacy skills, if you don't have the English skills, to be able to undertake those activities.

I'm very proud to be here, speaking in favour of this motion, because some 20 years ago this is the very work I was doing in my community to try to help workers transition into new employment opportunities.

I have to commend the member for bringing this motion forward. I think he's absolutely right in the comments that he made specifically around the obligation of the government to observe what's happening within our economy in current times, and acknowledge and recognize that people are struggling. People are struggling significantly.

The government can, on the one hand, say in response to a report they commissioned a couple of weeks ago, the Martin-Florida report, that this is going to be the knowledge-based economy, the creative economy, and all these new ways of talking about where our economy's going. You can't get there without making sure that people have significant abilities to communicate. That's what literacy really is, when you think about it. Literacy is about providing people with opportunities to communicate. It's not just about reading and writing. Every aspect of life requires someone to be able to read and write. In fact, we see technological change in so many

ways increasing in its sophistication, yet we don't see the basic, fundamental investments in people's literacy skills and people's English skills.

The important piece of this member's motion is to acknowledge that government has a role. Government has a role to make sure that people are prepared and able to engage not only in the economy and economic activity but in the broader social and political activities that a civil society has to offer.

Providing these basic programs to help people improve their literacy, to help them improve their numeracy, to help them improve their utilization of the English language, because that is the language that is most often utilized in our communities—or French, for that matter; we have French-as-a-second-language programs as well that need funding. The bottom line is that without providing these kinds of programs, you are really doing a couple of things: You are preventing people—and these are bright people. In fact, it takes very, very bright people to be able to get by in society without having literacy skills. They have to be very adaptable. They have to be very bright in terms of trying to navigate their way through a world that communicates in written language and numerical language quite significantly. Without those skills, without those basics in hand, people have to become quite adept and quite quick, mentally, to be able to get through life without having those basic skills. It's extremely important that the government is there to make sure those skills are obtained by people.

It is not a matter of inability; it's a matter of lack of access. Nobody wants to be in a position where they are not able to read and write; nobody wants to be in that position. Numbers of circumstances occur. Sometimes it's an undiagnosed learning disability. Sometimes it's a lack of opportunity in terms of education. Sometimes it's the fact that the education that people are exposed to is not the kind of education in which they are best able to learn. There are many ways that people learn. People do not all learn in the same way.

For many, many reasons, in fact, people are in a situation where they need to upgrade their literacy and numeracy skills, and it's incumbent upon this government, if they are really serious about the knowledge economy that they talk about, to make sure all Ontarians are able to engage in that knowledge economy. The only way of making sure that will be the case is to make sure that these programs are funded so that the ever-increasing pressure that is currently on the agencies that provide these programs is reduced. In other words, people are clamouring for these programs; people are clamouring to get into these programs. The agencies have waiting lists. They can't provide a number of courses and services to people because they are simply underfunded. That's unacceptable. That's a number of folks who then have opportunity taken away from them, opportunity to engage in the economy, opportunity to engage in retraining, opportunity to grow in many kinds of different ways. It has been very obvious that this area has been underfunded for a long time, but certainly now, within the

context of economic downturn and people having to and being forced to either retrain and/or go into a new field and/or just apply for a new job, it's very, very serious times. Now more than ever we need to make sure that the basic, fundamental tools are available to people so that they can succeed, so that they can "transition" into a better job, into a new educational program, into an upgrading program, into a trade.

Unfortunately, the government hasn't seen the importance of this, and that's something that needs to turn around. You can't have these transitions occur if you don't ensure that you're providing the resources for the workers and for the people of the province to be able to take advantage of any opportunity that might be out there. Lord knows, there is not a lot of opportunity out there, I think we would all agree. In Ontario, we have about five million people who do not have the literacy skills to cope with the demands of a typical workplace. Approximately two million Ontarians in this current day are illiterate. That means they're unable to read street signs, forms, transit schedules or anything else like that. Almost 18% of the population is shut out of a variety of critical opportunities and enhanced quality of life, as I've already described. They require adequate, accessible literacy programs in their own communities. Having these programs in your own community contextualizes the learning for you and enables you to grasp a lot more easily the concepts that are being brought forward.

My colleague here from Parkdale-High Park wants to make a few comments on this issue as well. I'm sure she will agree with me that this is a motion that we can support, but we really do recognize that not only is this government failing in terms of English as a second language, literacy and numeracy upgrading and funding those resources, but we also know—we spoke about it earlier in question period—that this government is dead last, at the back of the pack, in terms of funding for post-secondary education on a per capita basis. We know that special education programs and ESL in our classrooms in Ontario are significantly underfunded. The resources aren't there to provide those children with the learning that they need in order to be able to succeed. The reality is that under this government, the education Premier's watch, approximately 42% of the population doesn't have the fundamental necessities in terms of literacy and numeracy skills. That's unacceptable. The government talks the talk, but they need to walk the walk and read the book in terms of investments in literacy, investments in education, if they actually want to accomplish what they claim to want to accomplish in terms of moving our economy forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join this debate. I can sort of sense the consensus in the air. I would say to my colleague across the floor, my friend the member for Simcoe North, without wishing to presume the will of the House, my intuition tells me he's going to get this one through today.

I want to start off with two short anecdotes that will perhaps serve to illustrate the point that the member is trying to make and that I think we as members are trying to reinforce. A little more than 20 years ago, I joined a team. I'm a goaltender. The guy who was running the team, I remember, the second or third game in, was having some trouble filling in the lineup card. I was looking over at this and I thought to myself, "Hmm." I went over and I said, "Can I give you a hand with that?" He said, "Oh, would you, please?" I looked at it and knew right away what the problem was: He couldn't read it. I filled out the lineup card for him and just took that over. I took care of all the paperwork for the team. This was a guy who had been born and raised in Canada of parents who had been born and raised in Canada. He had high school graduation, but for all functional purposes he was illiterate.

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This is not uncommon in our society in the 21st century. Today, we have a lot of adult men and women—I would say there is a fairly significant male skew to it—who cannot functionally read and write. It is indeed a tragedy not merely for the lost opportunity for the individuals but for the lost opportunity for our province to use the strengths and skills the people have.

My second anecdote: One year back in the 1990s, I was attending an Eid banquet in Mississauga, and a friend of mine came and said to me, "I need a favour from you." I said, "Sure. What is it?" He said, "Well, we're trying to get together an introductory Arabic class at our community centre." I said, "Okay, how can I help?" He said, "Well, we're a few students short of a critical mass, so how would you like to learn Arabic for eight weeks?" I said, "Me?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, what for?" And he said, "Well, it can't hurt." As it turned out, it was one of the more valuable experiences I had from a whole number of different respects.

Here is what's relevant to what we are discussing here, which is the resolution of the member for Simcoe North. About halfway through the eight weeks, I remember I left the class. We had all been doing our best to think and read and write in Arabic, and I was struggling because I didn't have a chance to use Arabic during the week. It occurred to me as I was driving home that when I left the class, I could read the street signs, I could go into a grocery store and read what was on the cans and on the boxes, I could turn on the radio and understand what was being said, I could look at a map and understand the directions. But for men and women who were coming from their country of birth where, in many cases, their language and their alphabet were not ours, when they would leave their English-as-a-second-language class, they couldn't read a street sign, couldn't go into a store and look at the packaging and understand what they were buying, couldn't turn on the television or the radio and comprehend what was being said. It's very important to understand the degree to which you're culturally and socially cut off if you don't have fundamental reading,

writing and numeracy skills. That is the point that I think the member is bringing out very eloquently.

There's not a lot in here that really should devolve into partisan rhetoric, but there are a few fundamental points we should make that, frankly, I think we agree on. The member, who is very active in his comments on corrections, should know, and I'll echo this, that literacy is certainly a factor in keeping people out of correctional institutions and certainly away from gangs. If you can read and write, if you can do math, you're far, far less likely to fall into a life of crime or end up being an under-achiever.

A couple of things that our government has been doing—I want to talk very briefly about two programs, both of them recently announced. One is assistance for laid-off workers. For laid-off workers, this is also an opportunity. For laid-off workers, Ontario now offers a boost to help you with the cost of tuition, books, living expenses and other costs associated with training to rebuild your skills and get on with another career. This is something we had hitherto not done.

The second one I want to bring up is, again, a very new program. With regard to the member's comments, I think it's premature to judge a program that hasn't yet had a chance to filter its way into the minds of its intended market, let alone attract its critical mass. Second Career is part of the \$2-billion skills to jobs action plan. Second Career is a very important program. It was launched in June 2008 and covers workers who were laid off as far back as January 2005—for example, workers who may have taken an interim job to make ends meet—and offers short-term training options, generally less than six months, for laid-off workers who are not eligible for employment insurance. Potential additional financial assistance for workers who qualify will cover expenses for the cost of their academic training if they need to live away from home while they're participating in training, and so on and so forth.

In the time I've had, I have been pleased to bring a couple of my personal thoughts to a resolution that I believe our government and our party will support. I know that I will, and I commend the member for having brought it to the floor. I think it's an important subject that does deserve discussion in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I too would like to comment on the motion by the member from Simcoe North. I think it's a very important motion that we need to debate in this House.

I have met with the members of the Organization for Literacy Sarnia-Lambton, who assist adults in our community in obtaining reading and writing skills. The organization not only provides assistance with math and basic computer skills, but also supports those individuals who are struggling to enter apprenticeship programs.

I was very disappointed to learn, when I met with this organization, that they have been struggling and operating for a number of years with only \$63,000 in core

funding. This \$63,000 covers rent, administration and wages, which as we know is just not realistic in this day and age. In fact, the executive director, who is a retired school teacher, bless her heart, has not even been drawing a wage for the last number of years in order for the program to keep functioning.

This organization in our area was staffed by Mrs. Jean Doull. She has just recently retired and been replaced by another volunteer. The organization in our area relies on the community for donations and volunteers to maintain this valuable service. The initiative cannot run long-term without increased support from the government.

It came to my attention that the federal government transferred approximately \$34 million to the province in their labour market agreement. My understanding was that these dollars were to support the over two and a half million people who do not read and write well enough to fully participate in today's economy.

The organization also informed me that this program has not seen an increase in funding since 2002, which at that time amounted to \$1,300. I wrote to the minister at the time and asked him to consider an increase to these organizations in the upcoming budget so they could do the work that's so important.

I also had another person who wrote me and asked that I mention her story today in the House—I'm not going to mention her by name. She talked about how the financial statement of costs is pathetic—\$63,000 in core funding to support accommodation and staff, as outlined in the documents. No core funding for them from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities or from the Ministry of Education; this program has to survive on community donations and volunteers.

Many families rely on these free programs to help their children. Low-income and most middle-class families cannot afford organizations like the Sylvan Learning Centres, which can cost in excess of \$300 to \$400 a month.

As I said, this young lady asked me to mention her child. His name is Jacob. He was way behind in his class in reading and writing skills. She said it would also affect his self-esteem. Jacob has attended a program at the Organization for Literacy Sarnia-Lambton every Thursday since September until June. "The progress he has made is amazing. His grades have improved and his self-esteem. Jacob may always require these additional supports to keep up with the rest of the class. How you can put a price tag on that?"

I'm going to share my time with some other members of our party, and I'd like to encourage the government, when they're setting the budget, to look at programs like these literacy programs and do what they can to help.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise in support of the member from Simcoe North on this motion. As my colleague from Hamilton Centre said, it's a good one. I certainly hope that not only does it pass today, but that it actually sees the light of day in terms of the govern-

ment's budget, which is coming up at the end of the month, because it's one thing to pass a motion, but another thing to fund it. The member has put forward a motion because there's funding attached, and this needs funding. Let's hope that the Minister of Finance hears as well and does the right thing, and that it's not just talk from across the aisle.

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Some members of this House went down on a government tour to Cuba just recently. One of the shocking realities is that Cuba, this developing Third World nation, in a sense, has a higher literacy rate than we do. A couple of the stats from the Ontario Literacy Coalition are that 50% of the total population here in Ontario has low numeracy performance, almost 40% of youth—that's 16 to 25—have low literacy performance, and over 65% of those with low literacy are of prime working age; that's 26 to 55. That's not to mention the 832,000 immigrants in Ontario with low literacy performance in English and French. So this is a huge problem in our province and it's a problem that is clearly, from the other mentions that you've received already from other members, not getting the funding that it requires.

Again, the Minister of Education is not here at the moment, but certainly labelling itself an education government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I would just caution the member: We don't refer to who's here and who isn't.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly, a government that calls itself the education government and a Premier who calls himself the education Premier should be absolutely ashamed of these statistics and absolutely ashamed of the waiting lists that go along with them and the reality of the workers in the field and how absolutely underfunded they are.

So again, just to reiterate, I hope this doesn't die here. I hope this valuable motion is taken up by the government, not just in a vote today—which seems inevitable now—but in actual adequate funding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just to bring this home, I know that in my own riding, with many people who come to my office who are looking for work, one of the commonalities is that their language skills are very, very poor. Certainly their writing skills are very poor. So it is a real roadblock to employment; there's no doubt about it. In fact, I know that in some of the local organizations and social clubs there are usually one or two volunteers who read people's letters and bills. They look at their bank accounts. This is quite common, because a lot of the other adults can't read or write.

I have also been very involved in two excellent centres in my riding which under the former government were slated for closure, but we were lucky to save them. One is the Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre. I was just there last week. It has about 1,000 students from all over the world, adults—you know, 19-year-olds who come back to

school. It's an amazing place, the Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre. Part of the literacy and basic skills programs are offered there, at Yorkdale. There's also Bathurst Heights: 1,200 students there every day. I was just talking to them today about a situation. But they also teach basic numeracy, literacy, basic English. They are now full-blown open; the threat of closure is gone. We're looking at expanding, in fact, in a couple of those centres. So there are some very good teachers and some very good volunteers teaching literacy and numeracy.

I should mention that our government has been spending—I think we're up to almost \$75 million a year on basic literacy and numeracy, and that's an increase from \$60 million. Then there was one-time funding of \$2.8 million just recently. So it is always an incredibly high-demand area, and I'm glad the members brought this up. Sometimes we have to bring attention to these gaps that sometimes are there in the coordination, because there are so many programs going on.

I know the member was slamming the Second Career program, but part of the Second Career program offers basic numeracy and literacy. It's starting up. Hopefully, that program can reach out and expand and help a lot of people as they transition. I know that even the Speaker has mentioned some of the shortfalls in the Second Career program, but that's where we've invested, I think, up to \$2 billion in giving people better skills, and writing and basic numeracy are part of that. I think there are obviously ways to make that more compatible with the work the community groups are doing, because sometimes, as the member said very forcefully, the community groups are underestimated and undervalued. We need to do that, because they do the work with very little pay, very little support and very little recognition. So I think this is a good message for our minister, a good message for all of us here, that we have to do better, that we have to do more, and as a government, we're always open to that.

The good news, though, is that after many years—a lot of these dollars that Ontario taxpayers were paying to Ottawa were never getting back into Ontario—luckily, we did sign the labour market agreement, which means that some of those tax dollars you pay here in Ontario and that our companies pay and that you pay in your income tax and GST stay here in Ontario to help these programs. Before, all that money was flowing to that big welfare-equalization program that the federal government had—\$23 billion a year leaving Ontario and going all over the country. We keep some of that to help our Ontario people that need these programs.

So by signing that labour market agreement and by signing, also, the federal-provincial immigration agreement where there's going to be \$1 billion invested in newcomers in Ontario over the next five years, we're able to keep some—and it's not the federal government's money; it's the people of Ontario's money. They're paying the income tax. We pay more income tax and more GST than anybody else in Canada. We can't afford to keep sending a cheque to Ottawa to send to Quebec, to

send to Nova Scotia and to send to Newfoundland all the time. We have to help our people here. Luckily, with these agreements, we're now beginning to do that.

I know the Harper government has to be commended because they're beginning to change, because even our former Liberal friends wouldn't understand that. At the beginning, Harper and Flaherty wouldn't understand it. But now, all of a sudden, thankfully, there's a bit of a shift. We're able to keep some of our money here in Ontario.

God help us that we can keep money to help our own people and maybe help some with literacy and numeracy by keeping money in Orillia, keeping money in Barrie and keeping money in Hamilton. We need the money. God bless Quebec, but we also need to keep the money here in our own communities. That's what this is about, because we have needs for numeracy and literacy programs. Maybe if we keep more of our money here, we'll get more money for these programs, and I hope you all support that. Keep the money here. Help our own first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I want to recall for members of this House and for anyone watching us that it was sometime in the last year, if memory serves, that we all heard the story published in a book of a well-known NHL hockey coach who, after a very successful career, went public via this book with the fact that he could neither read nor write, but had obviously had a successful career in his chosen profession without that skill set.

The reason I start out today in what I have to say with that story is because it underscores the fact that he is one of the lucky ones. For every one of him—and he gets publicity because of his fame and the fact that people know him—there are thousands of people whose names we don't know. I think every member of this House has been exposed to that in dealing with Literacy Month and going to literacy councils in their own ridings.

I rise to speak about my colleague's resolution to ensure adequate financial resources for literacy programs. In Ontario, without a second's hesitation, anyone can see that we simply don't do enough. We just don't do enough. It's important for the government of the day—and it happens to be the McGuinty government at this time—to look into its budget planning and look into its collective heart and realize what we're talking about.

At any time, illiteracy, which takes many forms, not just the reading and writing part of it, is a very negative thing to have within our midst. Now, when we see people losing jobs in the tens of thousands and all kinds of applications to post-secondary institutions, you have to wonder about people who have a literacy problem that precludes them going anywhere near a post-secondary institution but requires them to have a basic skill set to just go and work.

Statistics themselves speak to the need for these resources, and the government has to follow through on the commitments that it has made to ensure retraining services to people who have lost their jobs in the current economic crisis and are in need of a new career.

Last year, the government of Canada invested \$1.2 billion in Ontario's labour market just to help individuals to improve their skills. Agencies are still waiting for Ontario's government to channel that money and fund their literacy training programs. We know that literacy is the most basic requirement for any type of success. Over the past 10 years, low levels of literacy have remained at 42% in Ontario.

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I want to underscore something else. Literacy does not mean that you're stupid or lazy or incapable. It usually means you just plain need a leg up. So that's what these programs are about, and it is extremely important.

If we're going to be serious about making sure that each and every individual in this province has the opportunity to reach their full potential, then we, as legislators, have the responsibility to provide them with an environment that is conducive to doing so. Lack of government support should never stand in the way of individual determination, ambition, willingness to work hard and to change one's life, which so many people are being forced to do right now.

Ontario's economy is changing. It is becoming increasingly knowledge-based, and the most basic knowledge you can have is reading, writing and arithmetic, which are the basics to literacy. But 30% of the population above 15 years of age has less than a high school education, with almost 40% of youth at low literacy performance. I have seen this personally. One would think that in a riding like my own, up in Thornhill, with an average household income in excess of \$100,000—how much illiteracy could there be? I can tell you: a heck of a lot.

I myself have had the privilege of standing before 100 people and talking to them about my background and why I developed literacy skills and looking at their backgrounds and finding out that there's an array of reasons why they didn't, and watching them so hungry to suck up the knowledge they were getting from that literacy centre, that was teaching them to be as good as they could be by having these basic skills.

So I talk about statistics, but behind the numbers are the faces of real people who do not have the skills required to succeed in their lives and to provide for their families. I again urge this government to do what it has to do to make sure that Ontarians, in today's economy especially, have these very basic and essential skills.

I thank my colleague for raising this issue and hope that everybody in this House will vote for this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I would like to bring the attention of the House to the tireless workers and volunteers who tutor these students and what a wonderful job they do. As the member who brought this bill forward mentioned, there are 265,000 hours of volunteer work every year. That's an amazing number.

I'd also like to commend the courage of the students. It's not an easy thing to walk into a library or walk into

an organization and say, "I can't read and write." That takes a great deal of courage. I would commend those people who do that, particularly later in life.

I'd also like to commend the generosity of the donors. There are private donors to these programs throughout the province—and there's never enough money. It's always a hindrance to getting more activity in the program. But those who do give, and give generously—I'd like to commend them too, because this is the front line of training and development, which gives a hand up instead of a handout.

Without literacy, when looking for a job, you're almost relegated to minimum wage and/or welfare. I often think that it's a misnomer to call it a minimum wage. I think it should be called an entry-level wage. If you're working at entry-level wages and you are not taking further training, then something is wrong in your life. You need that literacy. You need the skills with arithmetic and mathematics. You need the skills in order to move up on the pay scale. Every time you improve those skills, your pay scale will move up along with them. So it's very important. I think that some day we might rename the minimum wage as an entry-level wage.

I would also like to bring to your attention a few organizations in my riding. DoorWays in Burlington—it's an excellent name; it opens a door—teaches people how to read and write. There's also the Adult Learning Centre in Burlington/Oakville, which is run by the Halton Catholic District School Board. There's the Literacy Council of Burlington, and also Literacy North Halton, which involves Milton, Georgetown and Acton.

There are also YMCA organizations that teach these things. I would encourage anyone listening who is thinking about this area to go to their YMCA or look for a literacy council office in their area.

There are a number of success stories, and I think I might have time for one. This is a letter from a mother and it says: "I had to learn to read and write English so that I could help my oldest son with his homework. He was having a difficult time at school and they wanted to put him in a special school. I was very upset. My husband was too busy working to help him. I knew that I was going to have to learn more so that I could help him. I will do anything to help my children. He is now eight years old and he is getting As and Bs instead of Ds. He is a changed boy. He is happy and confident and loves challenges. My youngest son and daughter are doing well at school too. Now I can read the notes my teachers send home with them.

"I also have a part-time job working at a store as a cleaner. I have been there for one year. When I started working I could not do other jobs such as cash or taking customers' orders because I could not read. Now I can do these jobs and I like going to work."

How a student who is now getting As and Bs—I have to question the assessment process that was going to send him to a special school.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Dunlop, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank everyone who took part in the debate today.

One of the reasons we have a lot of the stakeholders here today is that they were actually at a book launch. The book is called *Learning from Our History*, and it's all about the history of literacy. They just did this before they came over to the House today.

There are a couple of comments I would like to make. One I see in a letter is that we learn to read, and then from that point on we read to learn. In this place, we just take that for granted, but you get passionate about people when you find out some of the issues that they face, particularly, as I mentioned earlier, people who have lost their jobs.

I was curious. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence mentioned, “Let’s keep that money here in Ontario.” Of course, there is only one taxpayer anyplace. What I want to see is, let’s get some of this money that we’re keeping here in Ontario, particularly that new half-billion dollars a year that was effective last year—I want to see some of that going into community-based literacy programs. If you take a look at these budgets of \$60,000, \$65,000 and \$70,000 for the whole organization—do the math on that. It’s less than \$10 million for the whole province. If you think of it in terms of the whole Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, it’s a pittance. How much money was wasted on the York University strike that could have gone towards this? That’s what I am getting at here.

If the government members are going to support this, fine, but let’s see results in the budget, because I am going to tell you something: I, for one—and I’m passionate about this because I’ve got some strong stakeholders in my riding that push me. I’m not going to let this drop. Even if you don’t put one cent in the budget, it’s not going to drop. We’re going to keep nagging you and nagging you and nagging you until this funding for community-based organizations is increased.

Thank you very much, everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. We’ll vote on this ballot item in about 50 minutes.

VISUAL FIRE ALARM SYSTEM
ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LES SYSTÈMES
D’ALARME-INCENDIE
À AFFICHAGE VISUEL

Mr. Arthurs moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 148, An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings / Projet de loi 148, Loi sur les systèmes d’alarme-incendie à affichage visuel dans les édifices publics.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Arthurs, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It gives me great pleasure to be able to rise today on second reading of Bill 148, An Act

respecting visual fire alarms in public buildings. It’s an act in simplicity in that it’s intended that all new provincial and municipal public buildings shall be equipped with a visual fire alarm system.

I had the opportunity during the last Parliament to introduce a similar bill. This bill has been scoped and focused a little more than that one to pay very close attention to those buildings over which we as a government of the province of Ontario have control, our provincial buildings and our broader public sector partners, our municipal partners, in that regard. It was scoped and focused so that, as an initial stage, there would be new buildings that, under our control and municipal control, could implement with ease visual fire alarms.

1530

I’m pleased as well that we have with us—and I’m going to introduce some of them momentarily—some guests today in support of the bill that has been brought forward.

I’d ask, though, as we enter into the debate today, that we think about what this place is like at 10:30 in the morning, for that hour. Think about the noise that goes on, the questions and the answers and the interjections that occur across the floor that make this place as exciting as it is at that point in time, that make question period the point in the day where the public pays attention to what’s going on in our Parliament, the time when they turn on their TVs, the time that the media report on. Then take a moment in silence to think about what it’s like for those without hearing when that’s happening. That’s the world so many in our province live in. The implications for that are very broad-ranging, not the least of which is the issue of safety and independence, and the personal respect that comes with that. What more fundamental function should we have than ensuring the safety of our citizens?

This has been the second opportunity I’ve had to introduce a bill of this nature. During both of those times, I’ve been very pleased to have the support of those in our community who are deaf or hard of hearing. I want to introduce just a few of those who have taken the time to express their support and to join us this afternoon—the list won’t be complete; it never can be—a few of those who have joined us today.

From the Canadian Hearing Society, many of you will recognize the name of Gary Malkowski, a former member of this Legislature. I believe that Gary’s riding at that time was York East. Kelly Duffin, Veronica Bickle, Paul Smith and Gordon Ryall: all engaged with the Canadian Hearing Society. Also with us is Linda Kenny, from the Ontario Association of Children’s Rehabilitation Services. This is a matter that spans all ages. I see my friends across the way expressing a gesture of welcome. I would like us all to have that opportunity to express our welcome to our friends.

Applause.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: We have our ASL interpreters here as well, as a most critical resource, ensuring that those with hearing disabilities are able to participate in

the fullest way possible in this particular process that we have before us.

There will be lots of individual stories about issues around hearing loss and public safety. There will be those who will tell us about situations in which they have awoken in the morning at a hotel—those people without hearing—to find out that the night before there had been a fire alarm but they had no way of knowing of that alarm.

This bill doesn't speak to hotels. It doesn't speak to private sector facilities of that nature. It would certainly be my hope, should this bill pass second reading, and should it see its way through this Legislature for third reading and enactment, that this would be a step toward a far more inclusive set of situations for those with hearing loss in our community.

Probably each of us in this place has neighbours, friends, co-workers, even in this Legislature, and family members who have hearing loss of a greater or lesser degree. It's not unusual for us in this place to bring forward issues of broad concern that affect us even more directly. My family is one of those. One of my children has a rather severe hearing loss. He works on the basis of his hearing aids. I'll tell you, without those, his functionality is much diminished. There are times when I think he turns his hearing aid off so he need not listen to his mother and father. Being the age that he's at, I think he occasionally may turn it off so he doesn't necessarily have to listen to his wife.

In all honesty, though, there have been times when—I'll give you an example of a situation. I mentioned hotels. At a summer place that we were fortunate to have, one evening about seven or eight years ago there was a very significant storm. It was one of those major storms where trees were crashing down. There was actually loss of life somewhere near us. The windows were being taken out of our place by trees falling. My wife and I were in quite a state. I hustled her into a solid part of the building. She said, "We should wake up our son." I said, "No, he's not hearing this." He had his hearing aid out; he was sleeping at night. There was no reason for him at that point to be engaged in what we were engaged in.

Having said that, it draws home for me the fact that as an individual, he had no opportunity to engage in a process to protect his own safety in our absence. In that instance, a visual fire alarm wouldn't have helped him because it wasn't a fire that was the situation. But the issue of safety and the issue of individuals being able to have the opportunity to protect themselves is what I think is so critically important.

During the last Parliament, the government passed legislation for accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities. It's a long-term process to ensure the broadest range possible of engagement of Ontarians in the full spectrum of our life through providing opportunities for accessibility for those with disabilities. This is an opportunity for government, for the committees and for the structures they put in place to implement one small part of that agenda, an opportunity through this Legislature for us to reinforce that we have an ongoing obligation to

ensure that legislation of that nature results in accessibility for all on all fronts.

There are times that I personally refer to deaf and hard of hearing disabilities as sort of a hidden disability. When we have our debates in here, it's much easier for us to identify with physical mobility disabilities. Those are easier to identify. I would even suggest that it's much easier for us to identify visual disabilities. It's easier for us to identify those, but it's so much more difficult for us to readily identify hearing loss, those who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their disability. So I think it's incumbent upon us generally, and where the opportunity arises, as I have this opportunity, to heighten the awareness in particular of those with disabilities in our population who might not be as readily and easily identifiable to us on a day-to-day basis. I'm fortunate that I have this privilege in this place to be able to do that in a very public way, to do that with my colleagues who are here on all sides of the House, and, as important, to be able to do it to the public at large with the media that we have available to us.

With the support of the Canadian Hearing Society and others who are here with us today, we've managed—they and us—to already put out a press release about what was intended in regard to this bill at second reading. I'm pleased that today on the Toronto Star's website it has been picked up as an item and they're seeking response to it, and I'm hoping it's in print tomorrow. The minister with whom I work—I have responsibility to the Minister of Finance. I understand through his office this morning that he said he picked it up on 680News on the radio, and just a short while ago, we had a call from a Sudbury radio station. They would like to do a short interview after. So I'm pleased that there's sufficient interest, in print and radio and other media, not just locally but broadly, for a private member's bill, for a backbench member from the Toronto area to have a call from Sudbury, saying, "Would you like to talk about why you feel it's important that you bring legislation forward to support those who are deaf or hard of hearing, to ensure their safety in public buildings, in provincial and municipal buildings?" So I'm pleased with the support of our friends here, that it gets that scope of activity even as we are in the midst of debate of the bill before us.

I know that the last time that I introduced a bill of this nature there was pretty broad support. I'm anxious to hear the debate as it continues today. The last time I introduced a bill, there were concerns about the implementation, particularly in those retrofit situations in buildings, and that's some of the scoping to ensure it deals with new buildings over which we have control and our municipal friends have direct control, as a clear signal and message of what the opportunities are broadly—publicly and privately—to ensure that those who are disabled through hearing loss have the opportunity to ensure their own public safety and to ensure they can act with dignity and respect with regard to that public safety.

1540

It's certainly my hope, should this bill have the support of this Legislature at second reading, that it may

yet see the light of day again here and, with implementation, might be the catalyst for many more things. At the very least, this is an opportunity today to speak to what the needs are, to draw the government's attention to this need and to draw the attention of those working on behalf of the government, through the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, to this segment of our population that needs our specific attention, maybe more so because of the nature of the disability, which is not as visible to us all.

Speaker, thank you so much for these 12 minutes. I look forward to the balance of the debate this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

The Chair would like to recognize in the visitors' gallery Mr. Gary Malkowski, who served in this House as the member for York East in the 35th Parliament. Welcome, Gary.

Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased today to speak in favour of Bill 148 and to commend the member for Pickering–Scarborough East on bringing this matter forward once again, and to also offer thanks to the people who are here today from the Canadian Hearing Society and other organizations for their continued efforts to keep this in the forefront of our minds and to encourage our efforts in this respect. Thank you for all the hard work that you've done, as well.

As you know, we in the PC Party did support this bill when it was brought forward by the member for Pickering–Scarborough East in 2006, and we're pleased to offer our support to it once again. We hope that this legislation is carried forward, not stalled in committee, and that the appropriate changes are made so that the deaf, deafened and hard of hearing are able to have the same right to safety from fire and other emergencies as those not living with a hearing impairment.

This bill, of course, if passed, would require that all new provincial and municipal public buildings be equipped with a visual fire alarm system so that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people are alerted to smoke, fire and other emergencies.

A member of the Durham deaf accessibility clinic, with whom I've met on several occasions, as well as Ms. Maggie Doherty-Gilbert from the Canadian Hearing Society, have advised me that in my riding alone there are some 7,000 people living with some sort of hearing impairment. Statistics Canada reports that by the year 2031, a quarter of our population will be aged 65 or older, which is nearly double the current 13%. Of course, all of us, as baby boomers, as we continue to age, can expect that we will also experience some degree of hearing loss. So this becomes a very significant issue that I'm glad has been brought forward.

Those people who wear hearing aids take them off at night, and therefore they wouldn't be able to hear regular smoke detectors—for the people who are listening to this debate or watching this on television—and what this would require is visual smoke detectors/fire alarms so that people will be alerted by strobe lights and other mechanisms to visually alert them to some danger.

As we know, the existing legislation requires landlords to provide smoke detectors within dwellings; however, there is nothing in the codes to require landlords to provide visual fire alarms for their deaf, deafened and hard of hearing residents. So it renders the rule to have a regular fire alarm or smoke detector in your home a little bit meaningless if it sends only an audio alarm. Just to have it for the sake of having it doesn't mean that it's going to provide any degree of safety for people. For this to be required in new public buildings would certainly set a standard for everyone, and for all new public buildings I think it certainly should be mandatory.

As the member for Pickering–Scarborough East mentioned, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act commits the government of Ontario to create, implement and enforce standards of accessibility with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises for the 16% of Ontarians with disabilities, including those who are culturally deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing.

The Ontario Human Rights Code explicitly states that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination. The policy and guidelines outline the details and give practical measures for an array of locations and services, including housing, to provide Ontarians with disabilities equal treatment and barrier-free access.

The Canadian Human Rights Act also extends the laws of Canada to uphold the principle that “all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated ... without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on ... disability....”

There are many reasons we should be supporting this bill, and I'm certainly happy to do that. But I would submit that we actually need to do more.

With respect to the issue of visual smoke detectors and fire alarms in residential housing, there has been an issue that has arisen lately with respect to who should pay the cost of hard-wiring these facilities in private locations. Of course, it's easy to go out and buy one that you can simply plug in—it costs next to nothing—but it's not going to provide any degree of safety for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. There has been a request made that this be considered an assistive device under the assistive devices program, because the cost of having one of these visual fire alarms installed in a home is very expensive when you consider that hard-wired visual smoke detectors are usually \$160 each, compared to regular smoke detectors sold at an average of \$15, and that the Canadian Hearing Society estimates that the average cost of installing three visual fire alarms in a home, which you would need, is over \$405. That would rise to more than \$900 once an electrician has been hired, when you consider the labour costs involved in hard-wiring these detectors in a typical three-floor home.

This is something, I would submit, that the government should consider because, of course, most people

with hearing loss have low incomes because of the disability issues related to vocational supports, which is another area that I submit we should be addressing. It is something that I think is a safety issue, and I would highly recommend that the government consider that as a further measure to protect people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing.

Another thing that I think we should consider is the actual real implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. I completely agree with the member from Pickering–Scarborough East when he says that when we think of disabilities, we often think only of physical disabilities, and there are many other types of disabilities that are not always immediately discernible but are every bit as real. We should be looking at accommodating those disabilities to the degree possible in this Legislature and in this building.

Certainly, there are many physical impediments in this building that are difficult to negotiate, but there are also communication difficulties that are encountered by people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing. We have, on occasion, had a sign language interpreter here for members—should there be members—pages and, of course, people who are here in the galleries as our guests. We should have this on a regular basis, as we have here today. I would submit that that's something we should be considering, as we go forward, to make this place more accessible for everyone.

We should also be considering ways we can implement the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act faster. To submit that full implementation will not happen until 2025—I think it's good to have a goal, but I submit that we should be working harder and redouble our efforts to make sure that not only this place, but all public buildings in Ontario and all homes, are made as safe as possible and that our buildings be made as accessible as possible to everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to rise in the Legislature and speak to Bill 148, and to thank the member for having brought this issue forward to the House once again. As he mentioned in his remarks, this of course is not the first time he has brought forward a bill of this nature. I want to congratulate him and commend him for his persistence in bringing forward this issue.

We know that the previous bill ended up in committee, but unfortunately it didn't get much further than that. Hopefully, this bill will have a little bit more success in terms of its movement through the House into potential law, and I would certainly support that. It's an excellent piece of legislation. As we know, a number of private members' bills that are brought forward are good pieces of legislation but unfortunately don't end up getting to the place where they become law in this province because they're left to sit on the back burner as the government focuses on its agenda and doesn't actually allow

enough of these bills to go forward. Let's hope that this one bucks the trend and actually gets over the finish line, so that we can have a better system in Ontario that ensures people are able to be warned, in whatever way they can be warned, and can best receive information when there is a fire that is in a location they are in.

1550

At this point, there are some 20 private members' bills that have been ordered to committee for review—just in this very session—and are sitting there, waiting in committee. Hopefully this bill, as I said, will be one of the ones that gets moved forward. It seems to me already from the comments being made that members around this chamber are in favour of it. I know members around the chamber were in favour of the last bill. I think that says something about the will of the MPPs, anyway, in this Legislature to see something go forward in this regard. So let's hope that the government is listening and does see fit to move this bill forward.

It's interesting for me to note, though, that there is one small change in this bill that is different from the previous effort, which was Bill 59. Bill 59 required that all provincial and municipal public buildings have a visual fire alarm. Bill 148, on the other hand, requires only new public buildings to have a visual fire alarm. If that's a misreading, I would ask the member in his sum-up to correct me, but that's my understanding of the difference between this bill and his previous bill. I'm going to talk a little bit about that point a little later on.

It goes without saying that New Democrats absolutely support Bill 148. The need for visual fire alarms in this province is an absolute no-brainer. It's something that we've discussed before, as I mentioned, at the behest of this member who brought the previous bill forward. Many of us take life-saving smoke alarms and emergency notification systems for granted in this province. The situation is not the same—it's completely different—for deaf Ontarians.

In fact, here's what the Canadian Hearing Society says on this issue: "As life-saving as these emergency notification measures and devices are, it is important to remember that, for culturally deaf, oral deaf and deafened, as well as many hard of hearing Canadians, they fail completely." While 1% of Ontarians are culturally deaf, 10% are hard of hearing and 25% experience hearing loss. That means a significant number of Ontarians may not hear the kind of fire alarms that other Ontarians use to get to safety when there is a fire.

This is one of the challenges we face, and it's exacerbated by the demographics in this province. As we know, our population is aging. The baby boomers are getting older, and there are some interesting stats that are provided by the Canadian Hearing Society in regard to hearing and loss of hearing as we age. The average Canadian right now is 39 years old. By 2030, the average age will rise to 45. In 2030, 25% of Canadians will be over 65 years old, almost double the current number, which is 13%. Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic condition in older adults and the most wide-

spread. Reports indicate that more than 80% of people over 85 have a hearing loss while 46% of people between the ages of 45 and 87 have hearing loss.

This bill builds on the requirements in the Building Code Act that require the installation of visual signal devices in the following areas: theatres, arenas, hospitals and long-term-care facilities, and 10% of hotel rooms. The Building Code Act changes were won by tireless work of advocates like the ones we have here today, advocates for the deaf. For example, in January 2008 the Ontario Human Rights Commission reached a settlement between Barbara Dodd, who is deaf, and one Toronto hotel after a fire alarm went off without Ms. Dodd's knowledge. Luckily, it was a false alarm. The settlement saw the hotel industry accept greater use of visual strobe light fire alarms.

It's unfortunate, though, that the bill contains no implementation details. For example—and this is an important one, particularly in the context of the current economy and the strapped municipalities that are paying for provincial government programs, let alone their own budget pressures—how are these cash-strapped municipalities going to pay for the expensive electrical upgrades required to install visual fire alarms? If the government decides to pass Bill 148, which we certainly hope it does, and which we believe it should, they must put in place some sort of funding support so that municipalities can be assisted in making the necessary changes.

A similar point was made by the Canadian Hearing Society when it comes to deaf Ontarians themselves having to install these systems in their own homes. Compared to a regular smoke detector, these systems are extremely expensive. The CHS has rightly argued that the province should be extending financial support to help deaf Ontarians install these systems that will keep them safe in their homes. It's extremely expensive to install the system, and unfortunately it's not covered by initiatives like the assistive devices program which help Ontarians purchasing hearing aids, for example. So you can get your hearing aids through the assistive devices program, but your visual fire alarm is not something that you can obtain financial assistance for. It seems really unbelievable that that's the case. We need to look not only at the legislation, which is extremely important, but we need to look at how we make the legislation function in a way that actually keeps people safe. The way to do that is to ensure that whether we're talking about municipalities or whether we are talking about individuals, the government recognizes and acknowledges that the expense of applying the legislation, of making the legislation effective, would be in providing financial support for folks and for municipalities to help to implement the systems.

Why does Bill 148 apply only to new buildings? This is a question that I have about this bill. Shouldn't all public buildings have visual fire alarms? It shouldn't be just newly constructed buildings. It should be what the member had provided in his previous bill, which was that all public buildings be retrofitted to include visual fire

alarms. In fact, one would wonder if it isn't more likely that an older building may have wiring problems or other kinds of situations that would make it more important to have visual fire alarms in those older buildings. It's an issue that I think is problematic. It reminds me of the issue of sprinklers in retirement homes. We all know that in 1995, eight Mississauga retirement home residents were killed in a fire. The facility didn't have a sprinkler system. An inquest was held and pages and pages of recommendations were brought forward. One of those recommendations was for mandatory sprinklers in all residential care facilities. The government ignored the recommendation, unfortunately, and introduced a requirement that only new residential care facilities need to have sprinkler systems—very similar.

The old bill was one that required it of all government buildings and public buildings; this one now, only new government buildings and public buildings. In the case of the sprinkler system, this January just past, almost 15 years later, two seniors died in a fire in Orillia—and all of us will remember that tragic day—in a retirement home that did not have sprinkler systems. Why didn't it have sprinkler systems? It wasn't required to have sprinkler systems because it was an older home, built before 1996. Why two different governments ignored pages and pages of life-saving recommendations that stemmed from that tragedy in 1995, a decade and a half ago, is hard to understand.

The sprinkler system requirement should have been in place for all older and newer homes. It was irresponsible not to follow up on those recommendations. In the case of this bill, I would hope, if we get it to committee, if we get to a point where we're actually, hopefully, moving it forward, the member would take the idea of an amendment that would include retrofitting the older buildings and not just new buildings.

That's the concern I have with the bill. I'm worried that we're making some of the same mistakes as have been made by government in the past 15 years or so since that tragedy that occurred with the sprinkler system issue in Mississauga in 1995. Again, it's about safety. It's about maintaining and ensuring that people are able to safely leave a building because they've had the appropriate warning that a fire is taking place in that building.

While visual fire alarms are critical for deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians, I also wanted to raise one final issue, and that is the issue of the poverty and unemployment that is disproportionately affecting deaf Ontarians. In fact, this is a situation that gets more dire every year.

1600

In the last two years, the number of deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians who are living in poverty has risen by 14%. This screams out for the need of a significant investment in an anti-poverty strategy—not a policy, like what this government is bringing forward, that commits other governments to fund programs, but a strategy that is backed by dollars here in Ontario to assist low-income Ontarians. We recommended a \$1.2-billion anti-poverty

plan. The government is proposing a \$300-million target over five years, and it's not going to meet the 25 in 5 demand that everyone knows anti-poverty activists are demanding from our government.

This ODSP figure that I mentioned earlier also illustrates how critical it is for the government to boost funding in employment services programs. The Canadian Hearing Society has requested \$2.5 million in addition to employment services funding to help deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians get a job. Without a doubt, that's a proposal worth funding as well. Fund assistance in terms of implementing the devices in their homes, help municipalities, and let's get some hard of hearing and deaf people back to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I guess the first question that would come to my mind is, why would we not want to pass this bill? This is one that makes perfect sense, and, on a day like today, where three very thoughtful, very workable resolutions and bills have been brought forward, I think this is going to be one day on which the Legislature will look back and say, "On this day, we advanced Ontario a little bit, to the limit of our ability as private members."

Obviously, I'm going to support the bill, and I want to add some perspective on it.

I spent some time as the parliamentary assistant to the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat between 2005 and 2007. To echo some of the comments made in part by some of the other members, for every person, every senior, aged 65 and over today, by the time we, the baby boomers, get to be in our senior years in our peak numbers, there will be two. For every person aged 80 or above alive today, by the time those of us in our age group in this Legislature get to be octogenarians, there will be three. Over the age of 50, the odds of your having some hearing loss are about one in two.

So the question then is, if we're going to do something with regard to assists for those with hearing loss, in whole or in part, what's going to make that decision? Should it be an act of this Legislature, which those of us who are debating this seem to feel it should be, or will it be a consensus forged in expensive and probably needless civil litigation that ends up coming back here and saying, "We have a body of judgments stemming from the courts that suggests the following things. When do we have to get on with it?" I think the member has brought forth a workable, reasonable proposal. I think it's worth acting on, and I certainly will support it.

The prevalence of hearing loss simply rises with age. We are an aging society—

Mr. Mike Colle: Speak for yourself.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Some of us, my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence notices, age more gracefully than others. Nonetheless, as one of my close friends said to me when I was turning 40 and he was turning 60, "The thing about turning 40, in your case, and 60, in my case, is it's way better than the alternative."

Many of us just wished Mayor Hazel McCallion a happy 88th birthday earlier this month.

Applause.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On the mayor's behalf, thank you. If you can turn 88 and be like Hazel, I'm in.

So with that, Speaker, I'd like to thank you very much for the time. I definitely will be voting for this, and I'm looking forward to hearing further comments on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I am pleased to rise in support of my honourable colleague the member from Pickering–Scarborough East and his Bill 148, a bill to equip all new provincial and municipal buildings with a visual fire alarm.

It is our responsibility, as a government, to ensure that those who are deaf or hard of hearing have access to information and services that they need, especially ones that save lives. We have done this in a variety of ways.

For example, several government services have a TTY alternative. From Telehealth Ontario to ServiceOntario, those who are hearing-impaired have the same level of access to government services as those who are not.

Another example is access to education. I am proud to talk about my riding of Hamilton Mountain. There are schools there, like Queensdale and G.L. Armstrong, which have classes for hearing-impaired children. I want to personally acknowledge and thank the staff and volunteers who continue to do some great work in those schools. Also, I'd like to acknowledge Scott Lowrey, the principal at G.L. Armstrong, as well as Jodi Turton, who's the vice-principal. The Queensdale principal is Mr. Ted Cambridge.

This bill, if passed, would build on our record of accessibility for Ontarians. In fact, it would increase the accessibility of some of the most vital information a person might need. As the Canadian Hearing Society has indicated, "Accessible emergency notification is an issue of life and death." I agree.

I'm glad we recognized some of our guests here today. I have a special thank you for a friend and someone who has come from Hamilton, Mr. Chris Kenopic, the regional director from Hamilton.

To many Ontarians, this visual alarm would be their only indication that their life is in danger in the case of an emergency. In fact, I've spoken with some Hamiltonians about the importance of this issue. Recently I was speaking with Jim Kay, the chief of Hamilton Emergency Services, and John Verbeek, the public information officer for Hamilton Emergency Services, and they both have said that this would be a great first step. This is a great first step to ensuring that those who are hearing-impaired have access to vital information when they need it most.

I know that in Hamilton we already have visual fire alarms in some of our public buildings. One of those buildings is Copps Coliseum. Copps Coliseum is a facility which can seat up to 19,000 people, and they do have a visual fire alarm. I'm also proud to say that many

Hamilton hotels, as well as some of Hamilton's newest schools, have visual fire alarms.

There is no question that there is more to do. We, as the representatives of the people of Ontario, and I, as a proud representative of Hamilton Mountain, must ensure that all Ontarians receive essential information in times of an emergency. Visual fire alarms are an excellent step in this direction.

I congratulate my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East for bringing this important bill to this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Of course, I have the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf in my riding of Halton, in the town of Milton. In that school, there is a library named for Gary Malkowski, who joins us today in the gallery as the only deaf member to have ever served in this House—although I do call that into question sometimes, as over the last five or six years we've been giving the government all kinds of advice and they haven't seemed to have heard a word of it. So I'm not sure Gary was the only deaf member of this House—certainly by actions, sometimes you wonder.

I think this is a good bill. I would obviously support this bill. As the member from the third party talked about, I would extend the bill. I think that there is a safety issue involved, particularly that safety issue in private homes. I'm not sure what the cost-sharing aspect of that would be, but I think it's something that someone who is handicapped shouldn't be at a disadvantage.

1610

When I use the word “handicapped”—I remember one of the first visits I made to the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. I was speaking to the students and I used the word “handicapped.” I could see immediately that the group I was talking to was perturbed; they were upset. I asked, through the interpreter, what the problem was. They said, “We're not handicapped. We're just deaf. We're not in the least bit handicapped.” They don't think of themselves as being handicapped. I thought that was a really wonderful thing, that they were fully prepared to take part in the mainstream of our society. I can say that I haven't made that mistake again.

You'll notice that in our Legislature, when the bells ring—which they will in a few minutes, perhaps—not only do the bells ring, but lights flash alongside them. I suppose that could say all kinds of things about politicians not listening to bells, or not listening at all, but being able to see the flashing lights. It's something that I think is beginning to happen in our society, in our building codes, but it has a long way to go, and this bill will help get down that road. I think it's a good bill and I'll be glad to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to join in the debate today with respect to An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings, brought forward by

my friend and colleague Wayne Arthurs, the member for Pickering–Scarborough East. I do appreciate that this is not the first time he has brought this important topic before the Legislature.

A great deal has been said this afternoon with respect to the importance of a visual fire alarm system for those who are unable to hear. When we take a look at the content of the bill that's proposed before the Legislature today, and look at the information that is proposed to be included in that visual fire alarm notification—(1) the fact that the fire alarm has been activated; (2) information on the appropriate response, including whether to evacuate the building; and (3) information on the nearest exit—we only need to turn our minds to circumstances when all of us have been notified by a fire alarm in a public building. As a result of being able to hear the notifications on the intercom, we knew that it had been activated. We knew whether or not it was a false alarm or whether we needed to evacuate the building—and at what speed—and to mobilize our family and those around us. We needed to know whether we were going to the right, to the left, up, down—how we were going to exit.

You think about all of the instances in your life where you protect yourself and your family because you hear something. As a mother of two young children, I often think about the challenges that parents have when they don't have the ability, as a deaf or hard of hearing person, to instantaneously know that there is something you need to listen to.

For all of us in our kitchens, it's not unheard of—perhaps I'm sharing that I'm not the world's best cook when I say there has been an instance or two when I have set off the fire alarms in my own home as a result of what's transpiring in the kitchen.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You didn't use it to call supper, did you?

Interjection.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Well, that's always possible.

That notification tells you you need to respond, you need to do something.

For us as public officials to have the opportunity in this Legislature today to take an important step forward, to say let's not build new provincial or municipal public buildings that aren't equipped with the latest in modern technology, to bring us into the 21st century, to provide the information to those who are our constituents so that they can protect themselves, their families, those around them—that's what's incumbent upon us as legislators in an inclusive and democratic society, where we pay attention to how we can save lives. Ultimately, this is what I know my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East is attempting to do. Let's stand together in the Legislature today and find a way to better protect Ontario citizens, save their lives and move ourselves forward as to how we construct buildings.

Visual fire alarm technology was not always available; it is now. Strobe beacons can provide very important information, and technology such as electronic displays

allows much more detailed and specific information to be provided. It is the opportunity for us to make sure that, as of this Legislature, we'll be moving forward with an important initiative. I'm very proud to stand in support of this bill and to support my colleague, and hope that we will see the Visual Fire Alarm System Act, 2009, coming into effect very shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Arthurs, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to take the opportunity to thank all of those members who spoke to this bill—I'm sure there would be more if there were time available—but certainly the members from Whitby–Oshawa, Hamilton Centre, Mississauga–Streetsville, Hamilton Mountain, Halton and Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I also want to thank those Ontarians who are here with us specifically today and those who have taken an interest in this bill for their encouragement in that regard.

I want to just capture for a moment what I think is the principal matter that's being raised in addition to the bill, and it's raised pretty consistently around the place during the debate: a combination of, "We should be doing more. We should be doing more in regard to homes," and as the member from Hamilton Centre raised, the difference between this and Bill 59; Bill 59 raised the matter of all public buildings, and this one raises a matter of new provincial and municipal buildings.

We come to politics and we come to this place, often, I think, with a sense of what we would like to do, a great sense of what we would like to accomplish, and I think what people are speaking to here today with respect to this bill are some of those things we would like to do and things we would like to accomplish. I bring the bill forward in a private member's format and function, knowing that at times there are things we can do in this place and there are things we can accomplish. In this particular instance, as much as I would like us to accomplish more under this bill, I'm practical enough to say, in a private member's bill, "I hope and am confident that this is something we might accomplish. This is something we can do as opposed to something that I would like to do." My likes are much bigger. My likes are like those of the other members who spoke. I would like us to be able to move on the adaptive program so that we could provide this type of protection in homes. I would like to see it in existing buildings, but I know that challenges exist when we do that here. So this is what we can do at this point in time, as opposed to what some of us might like to try to achieve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for private members' public business has not quite expired. We are required in the standing orders to spend a full two and a half hours, to give some predictability to when the vote will take place, so bear with me for the next two minutes.

This House stands suspended for two minutes, or we can chat about something for two minutes, and then we'll proceed with the votes.

The House suspended proceedings from 1618 to 1620.

CHILD POVERTY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has expired. We will deal first with ballot item number 70, standing in the name of Mr. Berardinetti.

Mr. Berardinetti has moved private members' notice of motion number 77.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Congratulations.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 71, standing in the name of Mr. Dunlop.

Mr. Dunlop has moved private members' notice of motion number 75.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Congratulations.

VISUAL FIRE ALARM SYSTEM ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LES SYSTÈMES D'ALARME-INCENDIE À AFFICHAGE VISUEL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 72.

Mr. Arthurs has moved second reading of Bill 148, An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings.

Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Arthurs, any suggestions about the committee?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly? So ordered.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1622.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

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