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**Journal
des débats
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Monday 25 May 2015

Lundi 25 mai 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 25 May 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 25 mai 2015

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

ISMAILI FLAG

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice respecting the flying of the Ismaili flag.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader wishes to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

The government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the Ismaili flag be flown on the Legislature's courtesy flagpole from 11 a.m. up until the next scheduled flag-raising today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that the Ismaili flag be flown on the Legislature's courtesy flagpole from 11 a.m. up until the next scheduled flag-raising today. Do we agree? Agreed.

Introduction of guests. The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no, Speaker, I was just going for a walk.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Community and Social Services on a point of order.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to allow members to wear green ribbons in recognition of the Trillium Gift of Life Network. Members of that organization are present in the Legislature today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Community and Social Services is seeking unanimous consent to wear the green ribbon. Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like everyone to welcome Toni and Peter Marinakos, from the city of Orillia, who are here today. They've been in the pizza business for 40 years, and for the last 25 years have donated all pizzas all day on Christmas Day to the people in the city of Orillia. Thank you very much. It's good to have you here.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to welcome to the House today the family and a friend of today's page captain, Bridget Le Donne. We have her father, Dino Le Donne; her sister, Claire Le Donne; her grandmother, Nina Le Donne; and our former page, her sister Gabrielle Le Donne—welcome back to Queen's Park.

Also here is her skating partner, Jakub Smal. Bridget and Jakub will be representing Canada at the International Children's Games in Innsbruck, Austria, in January 2016.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I am pleased to introduce representatives from the Canadian Solar Industries Association, including the president and CEO, Mr. John Gorman, and the chair of the board of directors, Mr. Bob Waddell. John and Bob are joined in the gallery today by many other CanSIA member companies who are at the Legislature to participate in a Queen's Park Day. CanSIA hosted a breakfast reception this morning and will continue meeting with members throughout the day. Please join me in welcoming the Canadian Solar Industries Association to the Legislature.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it gives me pleasure to welcome Ric Randmaa, father of page Madeleine Randmaa. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Join me in welcoming—not to the Legislature, but to the world—Alessandro Sebastian Ferrari, born last Thursday, May 21, to my office manager, Daiana. Congratulations to Daiana, proud dad Gianluca, and big sister Taily.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to give a warm welcome to Robert Heckbert, a student at Henry Larsen Elementary School in Ottawa. I'm pleased to announce that Robert will be joining us as a legislative page over the next two weeks from the best riding in Ontario.

Ms. Soo Wong: I have two guests from Scarborough—Agincourt, Jia Shen and Helen Shen, who are the parent and sister of page captain Philip Shen. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It gives me great pleasure to welcome to the Legislature Robert Heckbert, our page from Ottawa—Orléans, and his mother, Susan Bellamy, who is here in the gallery. Welcome.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to introduce Diane Crawshaw from the great riding of Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, who is here today watching question period. Diane is the mother of page Dale. Hello to you both, and welcome.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome representatives from the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies to Queen's Park today. Over the next three days, mem-

bers of J&J's Canadian and global team will be hosting a number of interesting events, including a discussion on diabetes today and an innovation round table tomorrow. Welcome to question period.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Please welcome Wilson Teixeira from Able Translations. He's here with a number of guests on a Canada-Portugal trade mission, including the Associação Empresarial de Portugal—Ana Ochôa, Sandra Silva, Marco Macedo, Andreia Matos and Adelina Lobo.

Remarks in Portuguese.

But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, Ali Ghiassi, my chief of staff, is here with his mother, Mandana Geith. Welcome to Queen's Park as well.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd also like to welcome Ronnie Gavsie, president and CEO of the Trillium Gift of Life Network, as well as Adam Lemm, who is also from the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

I'd like to take this opportunity as well to invite all members to join me in a caucus photo on the main staircase—following question period—with the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I just want to welcome a constituent from my riding, Vita Peri, who is the mother of page Luke.

SPECIAL REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report from the Ombudsman of Ontario, respecting his investigation into the timeliness and effectiveness of Hydro One's process for responding to customer concerns.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following report was tabled: on May 21, 2015, the report from the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario concerning the Report of the Review of Expense Claims Covering the Period April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015, Pursuant to the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Another week in the longest teachers' strike in 25 years has passed, and still high school students in Durham, Peel and Sudbury are not getting the education they're entitled to. Durham is now in the 25th day of their strike and those high school students have lost almost a third of their semester.

1040

The Premier was a school board trustee. She shouldn't need an obscure commission to tell her what we already

know: The school year is in jeopardy. So, Premier, will you act today? Will your back-to-work legislation ensure that these students will finish their school year? And can you promise grade 12 students that they will graduate in time to continue their studies next September?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: We share the concern about the students. We understand that the students in Durham, in Rainbow and in Peel have been out of class far too long. That's why, a week ago Friday, I asked the Education Relations Commission for their advice on jeopardy. I'm pleased to report that, within the last hour, I have received the advice from the ERC and they have in fact advised that the school year is in jeopardy in Durham—

Interjections.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Would you like the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, come to order. The Minister of Government and Consumer Services, come to order.

Please finish.

Hon. Liz Sandals: They have advised that the school year is in jeopardy in Durham, in Rainbow and in Peel. We will be tabling back-to-work legislation this afternoon.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A follow-up to the question from the leader: Provincial negotiations have been at an impasse, and we know they broke down again over the weekend. Your government has now said they will take appropriate action. I understand you say you will table back-to-work legislation today, but two weeks ago you were going to light a fire and, still, we've never seen a spark until this very minute, when we may see back-to-work legislation today. I don't know how long that will actually drag on for.

Mr. Speaker, there certainly hasn't been any sense of urgency on the part of the minister or the Premier. The students are going to lose their entire school year if we do not get them back in the classroom. For example, Durham students alone have been out 25 days today. That's 560,000 student days in Durham alone. On top of that, there are only 25 days left in the year. So already we know there's a real problem with getting their school year.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I guess what we're saying is, we're—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A reminder for everybody: I give you your cues and I stick with them. Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The act that we will be introducing this afternoon is obviously designed to get kids back into the classroom. We want the kids back in the classroom as quickly as possible.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Liz Sandals: In order to get the kids back in the classroom as quickly as possible, we need to pass the legislation. So I am writing to the leaders of both opposition parties to ask for their co-operation in getting this legislation passed this afternoon. But we need their co-operation to do that, Speaker. We can't pass the legislation this afternoon unless we have the co-operation of the other two parties, so I'm waiting to hear their response.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I guess the problem is, you asked the Education Relations Commission 10 days ago, on May 15. They never even worked over the holiday weekend. Neither did the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

All of a sudden now, Mr. Speaker, they're going to table back-to-work. They want everyone to support this today, but the bottom line is, where has the urgency been? Where has it actually been on behalf of the students in the province of Ontario?

We've been asking you for weeks now—for weeks—to get this thing moving, to get this two-tiered disaster out of the way. So when can we expect the students to be back in the classroom, Minister?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I couldn't quite discern the answer, so let's go over this again. A week ago Friday, I asked the Education Relations Commission for their advice. They consulted with everybody involved. I received that advice this morning. Within an hour of receiving that advice, I have informed the Legislature that we will table back-to-work legislation this afternoon. I have asked the opposition parties for their co-operation to give unanimous consent to passing second and third reading this afternoon so that we can get the kids back in the classroom.

It's over to you folks. You get to decide how—

Interjections.

Hon. Liz Sandals: You get to decide—

Interjections.

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

HYDRO ONE

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Today, the Ombudsman released his scathing report into the billing practices at Hydro One. There's Rebecca Carter, who received bills despite her house having burned down. There's Shannon Lebrun, who wasn't billed for over a year and then came home to find her power cut off. There's Alan Skeoch, whose bank

account was raided for \$11,000 by Hydro One to make up for two years of their mistaken bills.

To say the least, the government should be embarrassed for its lack of action and for its gross mismanagement of this file. I say to the minister, will you apologize to the people of Ontario and the tens of thousands of people that you ripped off and resign today?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: First, I'd like to thank the Ombudsman and his team for his comprehensive and thorough report and recommendations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Others will be cut off quite quickly, too.

Please finish.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As a result of a new IT billing system, an unacceptable number of Hydro One's customers, over an extended period of time, received an unacceptable level of service. The CEO of Hydro One and the government have apologized to those impacted. While we know that Hydro One has been working hard to resolve the issues—Hydro One has outlined that work in detail—further work and remediation are still required.

I have therefore asked the chair of Hydro One, David Denison, to report back to me within 40 days with a detailed action plan describing how Hydro One can further address the recommendations in the Ombudsman's report. I'll say more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Minister of Energy. Minister, the Ombudsman revealed that the billing errors cost Hydro One, and therefore the Ontario ratepayer, \$88.3 million. But not to worry, Minister. You could get most of that back if Garrison Petawawa in my riding were to pay the \$50.7-million bill it received in error or if the Beaver Valley Ski Club paid the incorrect \$37-million bill it received.

Minister, you're the minister responsible for Hydro One. Throughout this entire fiasco, you have been asleep at the switch. It is time that you were unplugged. Will you take responsibility today and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. I am going to invoke my rule: Those that decide to have the last laugh when I'm standing will be named.

Minister?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Hydro One's commitment to customer service will go beyond focusing and stabilizing the IT billing system, which is now well in hand. It will focus on a cultural change and continuous improvement.

Moving forward with a broadened ownership will make a better company to serve Ontario ratepayers and will unlock investments in infrastructure. The newly appointed chair of Hydro One, David Denison, is overseeing a process to select the CEO and several other senior managers.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings: second time.

1050

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Additionally, the chair and the Ministry of Energy are in the process of restructuring the board of directors. This approach will create a better company that will offer more efficiency and better serve the interests of Ontario and the customers of Hydro One.

And no, I will not resign.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the minister: When there's nothing else left, it's "Resort to talking points." I can only imagine how long this problem would continue if my colleague—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation.

Please finish.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I can only imagine how long this would have continued if my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington hadn't asked the Ombudsman to investigate Hydro One. In the future, the Ombudsman or any other officer of the Legislature won't be able to investigate Hydro One because your budget bill will remove that oversight.

Minister, that is anything but transparent. Will you commit today to removing all references to Hydro One from the budget until a much more thorough study of this systemic problem can be completed?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The budget bill does have provisions, if passed, that require Hydro One to create an internal ombudsperson to protect consumers and ensure fairness. We have retained former Auditor General—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We've retained the former federal Auditor General of Canada, Mr. Denis Desautels, to oversee the process to ensure it is established with transparency and accountability.

We've also established a customer service advisory panel as an independent body to recommend service commitments across all levels of the organization. The members include a university president, a well-known consumer advocate, a former Ontario deputy minister, the CEO of Credit Canada Debt Solutions and the former chief of the Saugeen Ojibway First Nation.

I've asked Hydro One's board to work closely with Mr. Desautels and the advisory—

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

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Selling off Hydro One is the most radical policy

change in a generation, and not a single Ontarian voted for it. Now the Premier is trying to rush her Hydro One fire sale through without even consulting people and without even giving them a say.

Will the Premier take Hydro One out of the budget bill so Ontarians can have their say on her sell-off?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the leader of the third party is asking is whether we will take our investment in transportation and transit infrastructure out of the budget. We actually will not do that because we know how important those investments are. The leader of the third party knows that we put it in our budget. We ran, in our platform, on a policy of investing in infrastructure, because there's not a community in this province that doesn't need investment, whether it's roads and bridges in our rural and small towns and in the north or whether it's transit in our urban communities. All of those communities need investment. That has been a cornerstone of our economic plan. So, no, we're not going to take that out of the budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians want their say on the Premier's plan to sell off their Hydro One. Speaker, 451 people applied to present to the finance committee, but less than a quarter have been able to speak. Hundreds more wanted to present but couldn't because the Premier kept the committee on lockdown here in Toronto.

Taking Hydro One out of the budget bill is a very reasonable request. The Premier can pass her budget, flawed though it is, and Ontarians can actually have a say on the sell-off of their public utility, Hydro One.

Will the Premier make her Hydro One sell-off a separate bill and hold hearings across Ontario so that people can have their say on what happens to their Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very pleased that there was the opportunity for people to come and speak to the budget bill. I know that there were dozens of people who had that opportunity, and I just want to draw on some of that material.

Mary-Frances Turner, regional municipality of York, said: "From the perspective of transit and transportation investment, this budget continues a long-awaited investment in public transit. The \$16 billion in dedicated funds that are going to be made available for transportation and other critical infrastructure across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, through the Move Ontario Forward plan, will have enormous beneficial impacts on growth, sustainability and the livability of this region for decades to come." That was Mary-Frances Turner from the regional municipality of York.

Annette Verschuren, NRStor: "I think the redistribution of capital and getting capital to work in favour of Ontarians is really critical for this committee to consider. Many times in my career, we've had to reallocate capital to places that needed it"—

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Burying the sell-off of Hydro One in an omnibus budget bill is just the wrong thing to do. Ramming through a Stephen-Harper-style omnibus budget with only four days of hearings is the wrong thing to do. That's not enough time to debate the biggest change in public policy in Ontario in a generation, nor does it give people a chance to actually have their say.

Will this Premier take her foot off the gas, listen to Ontarians and take Hydro One out of the budget bill so that it can have full and proper scrutiny and debate across this province?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact is that we put in place six days of hearings, which is far above the average, and the fact is—

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The third party says that it's four days. Yes, it's four days of hearings and two days of clause-by-clause. Mr. Speaker, I guess when they were in office and had one day of hearings it was just clause-by-clause. Nobody would have been able to depute.

Let's hear what the Cement Association of Canada says, because Steve Morrissey had a comment to the committee: "The billions of dollars invested in infrastructure are having a noticeable effect on the average age of the province's infrastructure and on the lives of the people of Ontario. These investments are helping transform the province while also enhancing competitiveness, which is crucial in Ontario today. We also applaud the government's decision to expand the Moving Ontario Forward plan to \$31.5 billion. The investments in public transit, such as the GO Transit expansion, which is helping to connect communities in Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa, and many other public transit investments are helping us to move within our communities."

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians have been packing town hall meetings. They have been signing petitions. They have been on the lawn of Queen's Park. They have been sending letters and emails to Liberal MPPs. They are sending a message that they cannot afford to pay the price for selling Hydro One. Ontarians are the owners of Hydro One, and they deserve to be heard.

Will this Premier do the right thing, separate her Hydro One scheme, put it into its own bill, and actually consult with the people of Ontario who own Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When the leader of the third party brings those people together in her meetings around the province, I wonder if she tells the people in that room that they will continue to own 40% of Hydro

One. I wonder if she tells them that the way the price of electricity is set now by the Ontario Energy Board is the way that it will be set after this change. I wonder if she tells them that the regulatory controls that are in place now will stay in place, and that they will continue to have control of the board. I wonder if she tells them that.

And then I wonder if she makes it clear to them that the reason we are doing this is so that we can invest in the transit and transportation infrastructure in their communities, in every community around this province. I wonder if that is part of her speaking note.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians are sending a very clear message: Stop the sale of Hydro One. Selling Hydro One will mean giving up strategic control of our electricity system. It is this control that allows us to make decisions that are in the best interests of all of the people of Ontario, not just some shareholders.

Selling Hydro One will mean higher hydro rates for Ontarians—Ontarians who already pay some of the highest hydro bills in the country.

New Democrats are proposing a very constructive way forward: Remove Hydro One from this Harper-style omnibus budget bill. Let the sell-off stand on its own. Give people a say. Will the Premier sever Hydro One from her omnibus budget bill today?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party knows full well that the provisions we put in the budget bill are an integral part of the budget. We've made it clear that investing in transit is a core pillar of our economic plan, going forward, and we ran on a plan to review the assets that are owned by the people of Ontario and maximize those assets in order to be able to invest in the assets that are needed for the future and to create jobs in the interim. That is what we are doing.

The leader of the third party is asking that we remove those provisions, that we remove the ability to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to do that, because Ontario's economy needs those investments.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people expect this kind of undemocratic behaviour from Stephen Harper. They deserve better from their Premier, especially after she promised to lead the most open and transparent government in all of Canada.

Selling Hydro One is a big deal, Speaker. Once it is gone, it's gone forever. Bills will only go up. We will lose control of a strategic asset that supports jobs, energy efficiency and conservation. Ontarians deserve better—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize for the interruption. I'm dealing with people on both sides having conversations.

Thank you. Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians deserve better than ramming the budget through the Legislature in a Harper-style omnibus budget bill.

Will this Premier do the right thing by the people of Ontario and sever Hydro One out of her omnibus budget bill today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, the opposition continues to attribute to this initiative the fact that rates will potentially go up. Before committee last week, the CEO of the Ontario Energy Board, Rosemarie Leclair, made this statement: The OEB public hearing process is rigorous and requires utilities to provide comprehensive business plans. "Proposals are examined and challenged in an open, public and transparent process which includes the active participation of ratepayer representatives as well as other stakeholders. In fact, the OEB is one of few energy regulators that provide significant funding to ensure that the voices of those impacted by our decisions are represented effectively in our proceedings."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington will withdraw.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the record continually shows that the OEB is reducing in a significant way the rates—

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

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. In his first opportunity to travel as PC leader, Patrick Brown not only chose to go to northern Ontario; he chose the Ring of Fire. I saw the excitement in his eyes. He gets it. He saw the huge potential in the Ring of Fire—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order. My statement still holds, on all sides. Finish, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: He saw the huge potential in the Ring of Fire: an opportunity of a lifetime to create jobs and help turn Ontario's economy around. But what he didn't see were the hundreds of miners who used to work at the base camp. They're all gone. They're down to a half-dozen workers, all because this government has done nothing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Let's put it to the test: It stops now. Wrap up, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We can tell this hit a nerve, because they've done nothing for seven years.

Patrick Brown wants the Ring of Fire to be at the centre of the economic plan for Ontario. Premier, why is it that Patrick Brown spent more time in his first two weeks on the job in the Ring of Fire than you have—

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

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I was paddling the Attawapiskat River in the Ring of Fire area two years ago, I actually didn't notice any members of the opposition on the river with me.

When I have travelled repeatedly to the north and met with First Nations, when I flew to Webequie and met with the community and talked about the training opportunities that are now in place so that people in Webequie could be part of the development of the Ring of Fire, I actually didn't hear a comment from the Leader of the Opposition. When we were working to put together a framework agreement with the Mattawa First Nations, when we were working to put together—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin–Caledon: second time.

Please finish.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —the development corporation to ensure that First Nations and business and the provincial government were together. But, Mr. Speaker, where was Patrick Brown when he was the MP—

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

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Well, Maclean's magazine called your strategy a "hodgepodge of hope, pray and blame Ottawa." That's your answer for everything: Blame Ottawa. But you haven't even made an application for a Ring of Fire—you're blaming them in advance, Premier. Quit pointing your fingers and actually get something done.

Our leader, Patrick Brown, has already travelled to the Ring of Fire. He got his hands covered in nickel and chromite dust. He looked into the eyes of the people left there, and he gave them hope. Seven years have passed—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Final wrap-up part of the question.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Seven years have passed since the discovery of the Ring of Fire. Premier, how many more years have to pass before you actually do anything?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd be happy to brief Mr. Brown on how you get from Pickle Lake into the Attawapiskat River and how you can actually canoe into the Ring of Fire area. I'd be happy to brief him on that.

I hope now that he is a provincial representative—he's not actually yet, but now that he's with the provincial government—he will call on Ottawa to match the \$1 billion that we have put up to actually build the infrastructure, because if the member opposite is not aware, what is really needed is infrastructure. It's extremely important that we build infrastructure to allow the Ring

of Fire to be developed. That's why we've committed \$1 billion. That's why we've been working with the First Nations to make sure—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Nipissing.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—that we can get that infrastructure built and the commitment of \$1 billion—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In case you didn't hear, the member from Nipissing, come to order, please. You asked the question.

The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, warning. You are warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The commitment of \$1 billion to that infrastructure goes way beyond talk and way into action. That's what we need from the federal government as well.

HYDRO ONE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. This morning, Ontario's independent Ombudsman released his findings into the 10,000-plus complaints around the billing practices of Hydro One—10,000 plus, Speaker—the most of any investigation to date. In his interim report, the Ombudsman pointed out that inquiries from his office around some of the most egregious of these billings for Hydro One customers were already getting action, what the Ombudsman calls his “moral suasion.”

With the Premier's promises of gold at the end of the rainbow for investors and accelerated timelines by this government around the sale of Hydro One, should Ontarians expect that the largest investigation ever undertaken by an independent officer of the Legislature will just be shelved?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

1110

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I've indicated earlier today that we take this report very seriously. We thank the Ombudsman for his extensive report. We are going beyond what has already happened. I've asked the new chair of Hydro One, David Denison, to report back to me within 40 days with a detailed action plan describing how Hydro One can further address the recommendations in the Ombudsman's report.

As well, Mr. Denison is overseeing a process to select a CEO and several other senior managers. Additionally, the chair and the Minister of Energy are in the process of restructuring the board of directors.

Mr. Speaker, we're changing the culture in Hydro One. Moving forward, it's going to be efficient, it's going to be a growth company and it's going to be benefiting the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: Speaker, when the Premier was down in the States pitching the

sale of Hydro One, she knew the Ombudsman's report was soon to be tabled. Were prospective investors told about the Ombudsman's investigation, or did the Premier simply say, “Don't worry. We're writing the Ombudsman out of the picture, and if you bank on us, that report, with its 10,000-plus complaints, just goes away”?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, as we know, the legislation contemplates an embedded ombudsman being appointed for Hydro One. We have retained former federal Auditor General Mr. Denis Desautels to oversee the process, to ensure it is established with transparency and accountability. Mr. Desautels, a man of tremendous credibility and experience as Auditor General of Canada, is overseeing the process for the IPO and is also overseeing the appointment of an embedded ombudsman to ensure that it is in place with transparency and accountability.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation. As the member for Halton, and as a daily commuter, I often hear about how important public transit is to those living in my community. Every weekday, GO Transit has 18 daily trips and accommodates roughly 30,000 passengers on the Milton line, giving it the second-highest ridership of the GO train lines on the network.

As part of budget 2015, our government included \$13.5 billion in improvements across the GO Transit network. This will lay the foundation for regional express rail.

This is great news, but those living in my community want to know exactly how these new investments will benefit them. Can the minister please tell members of this House how these new investments will help those living in Halton region?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Halton for her question and for the advocacy that she provides on a regular basis for her community.

She is quite correct: Our government is making a \$13.5-billion investment to improve the GO Transit network, which will help increase transit ridership and reduce travel times. This will result in more than a doubling of peak service and a quadrupling of off-peak service compared to today and reduced journey times for some cross-region transit trips by as much as 50%.

The Milton corridor itself will have service every 15 minutes or better during the morning and afternoon peak travel periods, and within the next five years the number of weekly trips on the Milton corridor will grow from 90 to more than 100.

Metrolinx will continue to work very closely with our government and CP, who owns a portion of the track, to find ways to increase and improve service for those living in Halton region.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the minister for his response and his efforts. I'm glad to hear that those living in Halton can expect to see increased

GO rail service through the Moving Ontario Forward plan.

My constituents want to know that our government is continuing to make critical investments in transit and transportation that will help keep my community moving forward.

In fact, since 2003, Ontario has committed more than \$278 million to improve transit in Halton, including \$5.1 million in Milton.

But one concern that I continue to hear from my constituents, and experience personally as a transit rider, relates to parking at the Milton GO station. Some GO riders are concerned that they aren't able to find a space to park in the morning. Can the minister please tell members of this House what our government is doing to help address these concerns?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank that member for her question. We know that many of those who commute on GO Transit rely on parking at GO stations. That's why we've built over 3,500 spaces along the Milton line for communities like Mississauga and in Milton itself over the last 10 years, including 670 spaces in Milton alone. Metrolinx's parking plan has also identified the potential for an additional 600 to 800 spaces at the Milton GO station, and we are undertaking feasibility studies to determine how those could be accommodated.

In the meantime, we're also moving forward with the GO Connect pilot project. Led by Milton Transit, this project provides an innovative way to get to and from the Milton GO station through the use of a dial-a-ride Web and mobile app, the first application of its kind in North America.

We're committed to working with municipal partners like Milton Transit to address local needs and get people moving across our region.

TVO DOCUMENTARY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. Premier, for months you've refused to hold anyone accountable for the allegations of bribery in the Sudbury by-election. Now you want to turn out the lights on a TVO documentary. Taxpayers spent over \$114,000 for your infomercial that you want to shut down. It's an indictment to you and your government that even when trying to film a documentary, the footage looks more like a crime drama. You personally invited the director to film you in Sudbury, and it's obvious there's something in that footage that you don't want to see the light of day.

Will you stop acting like a censor and direct TVO to air this documentary, and turn over the raw footage to the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said publicly, we worked closely with the producer to determine what the parameters or the scope of the film would be. It was to be a behind-the-scenes look at the budget. Over the course of the filming, there was a discussion about the scope of the film. We shared these concerns with the producer; that was our sole contact for the project, not TVO.

There was always a clear understanding that we wouldn't have editorial control; that was understood. I have not seen any of the footage. I've said that publicly; that is true. I've never seen any of the footage. We're really still hoping that the film can happen. Remember—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That's enough.

Please finish.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reason that I and we agreed to this was that there is a film that was made under the Bill Davis era—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Lanark: second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —explaining how government works. That really did need to be updated. I hope that it will still go ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier. Once again, the Premier's story is, "There's nothing to see here, folks." The problem is that every time you say that, the OPP and the Chief Electoral Officer think differently. If there's truly nothing to hide, then prove it: Let's all have a look at the movie. I'll even buy the popcorn, Premier.

Over the weekend you said, Premier, that you hope the film will be aired. If that's the case, I expect you to show some accountability by signing the release forms after question period. Will you sign those forms, or will you force the OPP investigators to sign yet another warrant for this scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, I will just say that we agreed to a scope of the film. I agreed to do this film because I thought there needed to be an update on a film that had been made in the Bill Davis era.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is warned. The member from Dufferin-Caledon is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It could be now if you want.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We're hoping that the film will be aired. There was a discussion about the scope of the film. My understanding up until this became public was that the film was going ahead, that we were going to be able to. I have not seen the footage, and I hope that we'll still be able to see it aired.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the education Premier. Speaker, under this Liberal government and a Premier who dubbed herself a negotiator, our schools have been thrown into chaos. In an effort to save a few bucks to pay off their scandals, the Liberals cut \$250 million from education over 2014-15 and diminished

special education funding across Ontario—and we know there's more to come.

1120

Students and families are paying the price for this government's short-sighted cuts to education. Will the Premier admit that her reckless cuts to the education system have thrown our schools into chaos?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me first say that this is a question from a member of a party that I would have thought believed in the collective bargaining process, as a start. Certainly, the NDP used to believe in the collective bargaining process.

We worked with our partners to put a collective bargaining process in place. That collective bargaining process has unfolded as it has. As the Minister of Education said today, we have just received the advice from the Education Relations Commission. I would just say that I hope, if there is concern in the third party for the students, that the third party will be supporting our legislation, which would get kids back to school as quickly as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier. We learned that central table negotiations with OSSTF have broken down. The Premier and her minister have not been successful in any level of negotiation with any board under this two-tiered system they so proudly introduced not long ago. Is this the new direction for relationships with teachers that the Premier espoused as a leadership candidate?

To make matters worse—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader: second time.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —it appears the Liberal government is abandoning its commitment to keep class sizes manageable, directly impacting learning conditions for our students.

Why is this government forcing students and families to pay the price for their mismanagement of the education portfolio in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's just talk about what we've been able to do in the last number of years for students in this province and for the education system, but reminding the member opposite that the process that is in place right now is one that was developed in partnership with the education sector, with the boards, with the unions, with the federations, because we all knew that there needed to be a new process and that it needed to have a provincial and a local component. That process is in place, and it is the first time the process has been used. There's no doubt that it has been a tough collective bargaining process, but it is a process that everyone agreed to.

The fact is that our 2015 budget will protect the gains that we've made in education: \$120 million over three years to create thousands of child care spaces, \$40 million in technology and innovation in classrooms from K to 12, Experience Ontario, which will invest \$20 million

over three years to help graduating high school students get experience—

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

HOME CARE

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In my time as a care coordinator for a CCAC, I often heard from my patients their desire to receive quality care within the comfort of their own homes and communities rather than in hospitals or in long-term-care homes. Helping more people receive care quickly and close to home, not only in my riding of Cambridge but across the province, is essential to providing Ontarians with the highest possible quality of care in the most comfortable and familiar setting for them.

Currently, home care is provided to over 600,000 Ontarians per year while community support services assist an additional 1.46 million, many of whom are seniors. Can the minister please inform the House what this government is doing to further improve our home and community care services throughout the province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to say thank you to the member from Cambridge for this question. Since 2003, our government has more than doubled the funding provided for home and community services. In fact, one of the four pillars in our government's Patients First action plan outlines our goal of improving these services with a commitment to delivering better coordinated and integrated care within communities closer to home.

Building on this commitment, earlier this month I announced our Patients First: A Roadmap to Strengthen Home and Community Care. It's the first phase in our plan to transform the way we deliver care at home and in the community. With a 2015 budget commitment of an additional \$750 million over three years, our government has put forth a road map for the future of home and community care. In fact, our plan endorses all of the recommendations outlined in *Bringing Care Home*, a report published by the provincial expert panel led by Dr. Gail Donner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Care coordinators, patients and families in my community of Cambridge will be pleased to know about our government's plan to improve home and community care. It certainly was improved over my years there. Our loved ones with needs that can be reasonably met within their homes or communities will receive support to do so, and with high-quality and consistent care across the province.

We know that care at home and in the community often goes well beyond the patient themselves. There's often a circle of family, friends and other caregivers involved. It's important that patients and their caregivers have control over what this care looks like and that we recognize the unique situations of patients across the province.

Speaker, can the minister let this House know about other initiatives in the community and home care sector that meet the needs of patients and their caregivers alike?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, included in our \$750-million investment to improve access and expand services for home and community care, we are funding an additional 80,000 hours of nursing care. We're expanding supports for family caregivers and personal support workers. We're increasing choice for patients and their families regarding the palliative and end-of-life care they receive.

Our government recognizes the vastly different needs of people across the province and will provide patients with greater choice and greater control to ensure that care plans are as individualized as possible. That's why we're piloting different approaches such as self-directed funding, to allow clients and their families greater autonomy over the care they receive. Our plan puts patients and their caregivers at the absolute centre of our system. It not only gives them the support they need in achieving the highest quality of care that they deserve; it allows them a greater say in what that care should look like.

SMOKING CESSATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: To the Premier: My family's story is no different than thousands of other families here in Ontario. We are a family of smokers. It has been generational. My parents smoked. My brothers and sisters smoked. My children smoke. This addiction is not just generational; it's also cultural.

Like most smokers, we've tried gums and patches, and they seldom work. But since I've started using a vaporizer, I've cut back significantly, and so has my family. It has meant that we can spend more time with our grandsons. It has meant that, for the first time in generations, we might end this trend. It means my grandsons may not grow up in a family of smokers.

Premier, your government is making a tragic mistake. Will you please reconsider and spend more time investigating vaporizers before you rush to a decision with schedule 3 of Bill 45 that will prevent people like myself and my family and thousands of others from quitting tobacco once and for all?

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

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member opposite for his question. But I really hope he has read Bill 45. I know he sat on the committee. If he fully understood the bill, he would know that we're not banning electronic cigarettes. All we are doing is regulating electronic cigarettes to make sure that we balance the potential benefits, which we recognize, against the potential risks. But it continues to be perfectly legal for adults.

I'm sure the member opposite agrees that we shouldn't have 16-year-olds being able to buy an e-cigarette or able to smoke inside a classroom. That is what we are doing. All we are doing is regulating. There is nothing in the regulation that stops a potential smoker from choosing to use an electronic cigarette if that's what they want to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I have read the bill, and I did attend the committee hearings—all.

Premier, there are only two groups that benefit from you passing schedule 3—

Interjections.

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

Please finish your question.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Premier, there are only two groups that benefit from you passing schedule 3 of Bill 45, and it's not children or the general public. Two of the most vocal opponents, and the two groups set to gain the most from this bill, are big tobacco and big pharma. By demonizing vaporizers, you are helping tobacco companies regain a market share that has been devastated by vaporizers. You're also allowing pharmaceutical companies to continue to market cessation products over the counter that are proven less effective than vaporizers.

Premier, how can it be that myself and others who are addicted to cigarettes are fighting big tobacco while you and your government are actively protecting and defending big tobacco?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Mr. Speaker, I believe this government's commitment to anti-smoking is the gold standard. So I don't know where he's coming from when he says that we are supporting big tobacco.

1130

On the issue of schedule 3, on the issue of electronic cigarettes, if you've read Bill 45, clearly, the way we have drafted Bill 45 is to make it very flexible. Should it ever come to pass that Health Canada says that e-cigarettes are a legitimate cessation device, we have regulations in place that would actually allow us to very quickly change regulations and ensure that it's treated exactly the same as any other cessation device.

In the interim, while we await better evidence, all we are doing is regulating electronic cigarettes. You can continue to use them.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Since 2013, the workers at Crown Holdings, Inc. have walked the picket line in an attempt to stop a steep rollback of their pensions, their benefits and their wages—21 months now, two winters. The government promised an industrial inquiry, but so far there has been no action. This is an untenable situation and the government should be stepping up to the plate. Will this government finally take some action on this long-standing dispute?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for the very important question.

We have indeed acted on this, and it's a very rare step that we've taken. In the province of Ontario, over 97% of collective agreements are reached at the table. In this case, we have an outlier, a very exceptional circumstance.

The reason that we took the unusual step of appointing the Industrial Inquiry Commissioner was to make sure that we got to the bottom of this, to make sure that we understood exactly what had transpired over this period of time to allow this to go on for so long without an agreement. I meet on a regular basis with Mr. Mort Mitchnick, a very well respected individual who has a huge background in the field of labour relations law. He will be reporting back his findings to me in the very near future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, time is a-tickin'.

People should be able to go to work and be paid a fair wage and not have to walk a picket line for nearly two years in the province of Ontario. People should not have to live on strike pay for two years and have to appeal to their union to make a mortgage payment.

It's time for the Premier and the government of Ontario to stop looking the other way. Will this Premier, will this government, force binding arbitration in the Crown Holdings situation and ensure that all of those who are now out on the picket line will be able to return to work with a fair deal?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Our government's preference is always to encourage the parties to resolve whatever differences they have at the bargaining table. If they need assistance with that, we've got excellent arbitrators, excellent mediators that we bring to the table to ensure that every single avenue is explored in search of that agreement.

Speaker, this morning I met with some of the steelworkers in front of my office from Crown Metal. I had a very good conversation with them, a very amiable conversation. I understand the frustration level. I committed to them that we would get to the bottom of this and we would find a resolution that suits their needs and their desires.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, a local constituent from my riding of Brampton–Springdale just landed her very first job at a grocery store. She is very excited but at the same time nervous. She's afraid she might not understand what she's entitled to, that she won't get breaks when working long-hour shifts or overtime pay when she's asked to stay late.

Minister, we know the ministry requires all employers across the province to inform their employees about the

Employment Standards Act. Usually, this is done by posting a copy of the employment standards poster somewhere accessible in the workplace, outlining employee rights including overtime, minimum wage, breaks, vacation pay, and public holidays, among others outlined in the ESA.

My question for the minister: How can it be assured that current employees and new hires such as my constituent are aware of their rights, and what steps has your ministry put into place to ensure that employees have access to information about their ESA rights?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the honourable member from Brampton–Springdale for what I think is a very, very important question.

Speaker, this government works hard to ensure that all Ontarians are treated with the dignity and the respect they deserve at work. In order to do that, to assist in that, last fall we passed the Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act. It introduced two very important changes to the Employment Standards Act.

As of May 20, Ontario law now requires employers to distribute copies of the latest version of the employment standards poster to all employees by June 19 this year. For new hires, such as your constituent that the honourable member mentioned, this information must be provided to them as a new employee within 30 days of their hiring.

It's not sufficient anymore for employers to simply post this information in the workplace. Employment standards officers now have the authority to require employers to conduct a self-audit. Any failure to post and distribute will be met with enforcement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Back to the Minister of Labour, whom I'd like to thank for his reply and for addressing this important issue before the House today.

These new requirements under the ESA will help employees further understand their basic workplace rights. However, in my riding of Brampton–Springdale there's a large ethnic community, and I'm worried that many of my constituents may have difficulty reading and understanding their basic rights listed on the poster.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What steps has the ministry taken to ensure that all employees, regardless of ethnicity or language, will be able to read and understand their rights under the ESA, and where can employers and employees gain access to the latest version of the poster?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: We all know, I think, in this House that knowledge is power, and people who know their rights can actually stand up for those rights.

To answer the question from the honourable member, the requirement for the new version of the ESA poster outlines that it must be displayed in English, unless the majority of the employees speak another common language. If that's the case, as it may be in this example, the employer is then required to post a translated copy of the poster right next to the English version. The ESA poster must also be provided in other languages if an employee

requests a translation. These translated versions are available from the Ministry of Labour. Right now, the poster is available in English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu.

The poster can be downloaded free of charge. It's printed on a standard 8.5-by-11 piece of paper. That makes it very simple for employers to distribute to their staff.

Helping employees and employers understand their workplace rights and responsibilities is part—

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

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Energy: Rex Ge is the kind of person we want to see more of in the province of Ontario. He's a Chinese Canadian immigrant who came to this country to work hard, provide for his family and give back to the new country he loves. He opened up a greenhouse in Smithville, Ontario. It's been running for 15 years. This January, he visited his ailing parents in China and he missed a bill for \$362. Twenty-nine days later, the utility, Niagara Peninsula Energy, cut the cord. They disconnected his power. The consequences were entirely predictable. The boiler shut down, the pipes burst and his entire crop in the greenhouse was wiped out. The cost to him: \$150,000.

Minister, would you agree with me that Niagara Peninsula Energy went way, way, way too far and they owe Mr. Ge compensation for the destruction of his livelihood?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I appreciate the question from the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook and appreciate that he has been here regularly. I'm pleased to receive a question from him.

The issue he raises brings to question the role of the regulator, the Ontario Energy Board. We have, I think, something like five million electricity customers in Ontario, and they do need a place to go with their complaints. The Ontario Energy Board has a report card, and they do follow up. In fact, the member brought this to my attention, and his constituent has followed the appropriate process, bringing the issue to the attention of the Ontario Energy Board, the independent regulator with the mandate to protect Ontario ratepayers.

I understand that the Ontario Energy Board has filed a complaint with the local utility and is currently awaiting their response. There is accountability, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I thank the minister, and you're right: We did, through my office, launch a formal complaint with the Ontario Energy Board on behalf of Mr. Ge. But I think we can go a step further. I've known you, Minister, for a long time. I know that, in your heart, you know the company did wrong. It was extraordinarily damaging: \$150,000 in losses for a \$362 bill. To boot, Mr. Ge had never missed a single payment. He paid his bills and he paid them on time. Not only was this a massive screw-up; it was cruel.

You play a unique role. You occupy, as Theodore Roosevelt said, the bully pulpit. You are the minister. You carry a lot of weight. I know it's with the OEB and the local utility, but, Minister, will you join me? Tell Niagara Peninsula Energy to give their heads a shake, do the right thing and pay Mr. Ge for his damages.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I definitely will join him on this particular file. It is apparently a very significant injustice that has happened in this particular case. I know that the Ontario Energy Board is now actually working with the utility to try to resolve this particular issue. Certainly any information that I have I will share with the member, and I will work with the member to try to bring this to a positive resolution.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Premier: Last year, on the eve of an election, the Premier showed up in Waterloo to announce an agreement to give \$120 million to OpenText to create 1,200 jobs. Now we see that OpenText will be cutting 5% of its workforce, and it claims that the job cuts are in line with the agreement with the Liberal government.

Premier, your own press release from the announcement states that "support is contingent on the company meeting ... job targets." Since you claim to be committed to openness and transparency, will you make that agreement public so that Ontarians can judge whether or not the 1,200 jobs you took credit for creating are actually going to be created?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm really surprised that a member from the Kitchener community would get up and criticize the investment that we've made with OpenText to create 1,200 very important high-tech jobs and bring \$2 billion of investment into this province that was on its way elsewhere. What OpenText is doing is creating an R&D hub here in Ontario instead of somewhere else in the world so that those 1,200 high-tech jobs will be here in Ontario, in your community, and you are getting up to criticize that investment.

I'm proud of that investment, I'm proud of the 1,200 jobs we're creating in Kitchener, and I'm proud of the \$2 billion that we're bringing into our economy. You should be too.

Interjections.

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

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurie Scott: On the 10th anniversary of the passing of Sabrina's Law, in the gallery we have parents Sara and Mike Shannon, Laurie Harada, Beatrice Povolito,

Chris Holcroft and Gabrielle Hadden. Welcome to the Legislature, and congratulations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. John Fraser: In the gallery here today are Emile and Beth Therien from my riding of Ottawa South. I'll have a few more things to say in a member's statement, and I'd like to welcome them here. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions?

Miss Monique Taylor: This morning I introduced the Le Donne family and I made an error when I introduced Bridget's friend; it's Jacob Smal. I'd just like to welcome you to Queen's Park.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SERVICE CLUBS

Mr. Jim Wilson: I raise today to talk about my recent private member's resolution that asked the Minister of Finance to task a committee of this Legislature to fully investigate the challenges facing service clubs in Ontario. I've raised this issue many, many times, as you know, Mr. Speaker. In February, this House passed my private member's resolution, and I thank all members for that. I have received all-party support for the establishment of this committee, but nothing has happened. It has been three months since the government supported my resolution, yet I've heard nothing.

To further my effort, today I will be officially launching a petition to encourage immediate action. I remind this government that service clubs are the backbone of our province, providing social and economic benefits to the communities they serve. Service club members best understand their communities' intrinsic values and needs, and fill the fiscal holes that government and other agencies cannot. Yet service clubs continue to deal with a number of provincial issues and challenges that are hindering their everyday operations.

Once again, I encourage this government to give service clubs the support they deserve. It's time to task a committee of this Legislature to investigate the problems that are hindering service clubs from doing the good work they do in our communities across the province, day in and day out. There is no downside to doing this. There are a number of very simple provincial issues that look simple on the surface but are complex. They need the input of legislators and we need to have service clubs come here to Queen's Park and give testimony. We need to help them out. They help us out every day, and we need to help them out.

ESSEX MEMORIAL HONOUR WALL

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I had the enormous honour yesterday to take part in the unveiling of the Essex

Memorial Honour Wall, which is inscribed with the names of 1,405 local RAF and RCAF veterans from Essex county. The monument stands as a complementary backdrop to the Essex Memorial Spitfire replica aircraft erected as a tribute to the late Jerry Billing, a local legend and World War II Spitfire ace.

Jerry's call sign was Black Hawk. As we unveiled the monument, a magnificent black hawk soared above the thousands of people who were in attendance yesterday. It was quite spectacular, and we knew that Jerry was among us.

My wife Jenny and I joined nearly 1,000 people yesterday to pay tribute to our veterans. It was an amazing display of community spirit, none of which could have been or would have been possible without the amazing efforts put forward by the Essex Memorial Spitfire Committee. I want to acknowledge the efforts of Karen Billing, Monica Totten, Erik Billing, Bob Swaddling, Joe Gibson, Bill Reilly, Todd Porter, Randy Voakes, Al Timmins, Gerry Schinkel, Michael Beale, Michael Kohuch and Suzanne Allison. The committee or, as they are now affectionately known, the squadron, are to be commended for their efforts on preserving the memories of so many who gave so much for our country.

"Per ardua ad astra" is the motto of the Royal Air Force. It means, "Through adversity, to the stars."

To my friends with the Essex Memorial Spitfire Committee, I want to say thank you for aiming for the stars. You've done our community proud.

EMILE AND BETH THERIEN

M. John Fraser: Aujourd'hui, je prends la parole pour souligner le travail accompli par Emile et Beth Therien, deux résidents de ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Sud.

Today, I rise to celebrate the compelling work being done by Emile and Beth Therien, two long-time residents of my riding of Ottawa South. In 2006, the Theriens' daughter, Sarah Beth, passed away suddenly. Despite losing their daughter at the young age of 32, they were able to turn a tragic event into something positive. Having known that Sarah Beth was a passionate supporter of organ and tissue donation, Emile and Beth were determined to see through their daughter's wishes of being an organ donor.

Although she did not meet the criteria to donate, they tirelessly advocated on her behalf so that her organs could be used to help save the lives of others. Through their courageous determination, they were successful, and Sarah Beth Therien became the first organ donor after cardiac death in Canada. Her kidneys gave active, productive life back to two people; her corneas restored full sight to two more.

Since then, Emile and Beth have continued to exhibit leadership in their community. Their advocacy on the issue of organ and tissue donation has already had an extraordinary impact. They have selflessly volunteered their time and work. For these reasons and many more,

they were both recently recognized with the 2014 Trillium Gift of Life Network Champion Award.

J'aimerais remercier Emile, Beth et leur fille, Sarah Beth, pour leur dévouement et leur compassion.

Thank you, Emile and Beth, for the compassion that you and your daughter, Sarah Beth, have selflessly demonstrated.

BRUCE GREY MUSIC HALL OF FAME

Mr. Bill Walker: There are a lot of talented people in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. In fact, our musical landscape is so vast that some of my constituents decided the best way to capture it all would be to build it a home, a home for all the history of local talent and artists who make their name in Bruce-Grey.

So it is with great enthusiasm that I rise today to announce the grand opening of the Bruce Grey Music Hall of Fame on June 7 in my hometown of Hepworth. To mark this special occasion, a real horse-mule wagon train caravan will travel to what was originally the Hepworth Country Music Auditorium, founded and built by John Kocher. Now it's home to the Hepworth Shallow Lake Royal Canadian Legion.

The Hepworth auditorium has a long and proud music history, with performances from several famous artists, including Canadian icon the late Stompin' Tom Connors, as well as Whispering Bill Anderson, Leroy Van Dyke and Bobby Bare, both of whom performed in the hall back in 1968. There were also Mel Tillis, Don Gibson, Hank Locklin, Webb Pierce and many more.

It was there that I attended my first country and western concert, featuring Billy Walker, at the age of three, courtesy of my older sisters, Marie, Marj and Bonnie.

Induction into the music hall of fame will be a proud honour for our riding's art and entertainment talents. The first inductees will be announced on June 7 after a concert by local musical performers Rudy and Jean Couture. There will also be a silent auction hosted by Funny Farm newspaper columnist Jim Merriam and a live auction with myself, Jerry Ruth and Durk Devries of Sure-Bid auctions, Pelee Island Music Hall of Fame Commemorative Wine and a fish-fry dinner served by Legion members.

Inductees' names will be showcased on a seven-foot maple cherrywood Epiphone replica guitar, custom-made by Exquisite Wood Designs of Owen Sound and sponsored by Exquisite, 560 CFOS and Country 93 radio.

I'd also like to recognize some of the gentlemen who poured their hearts and souls into this project, creating something that captures our vast pool of talent in art and entertainment and, most importantly, all genres of local music, from the symphony to the blues and country and western, and all entertainers, entertainment writers, and radio and TV personalities who made their mark in Bruce-Grey. They are Bill Murdoch, former MPP, of Bognor Jam Production and Promotion, and fellow music promoter Arnie Clark, who themselves left an indelible mark on our riding with shows such as the Jailhouse

Rock, True Country and Grand Ole Opry Hepworth North, as well as Jim Merriam and Kevin Moyses.

It'll be a great show. I welcome everyone to attend.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Miss Monique Taylor: Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to meet with members of the ODSP Action Coalition, a province-wide coalition of advocates tirelessly fighting on behalf of people living with disabilities.

Many people with disabilities depend on ODSP for their survival, but surviving on ODSP is no small feat. Poverty-level benefits have failed to keep up with the ever-increasing cost of food, electricity and rent in Ontario, where a monthly benefit for a single person tops out at \$1,100, while the average bachelor apartment in Toronto is close to \$900.

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Due to their disabilities, most ODSP recipients are not able to work full-time, but when their health allows, many try to work part-time, both for the sense of satisfaction it provides and because they desperately need every possible extra dollar to pay for the extra basic costs of living in Ontario.

This October, the Liberal government will cut the Work-Related Benefit for ODSP recipients. They will cut the \$100 monthly benefit that supports people with disabilities to participate in the workforce. This cut will deepen poverty and will create yet another barrier for people with disabilities to participate in the workforce.

As the NDP critic for community and social services, I call on this Premier, Kathleen Wynne, and her Liberal government to reverse this cruel decision and reverse the cut to the Work-Related Benefit for people on ODSP.

HUMBER VALLEY VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Mr. Yvan Baker: The strength of our communities relies to such a great extent on the commitment and hard work of people and volunteers who advocate on behalf of their communities. There are so many examples of that in my community of Etobicoke Centre.

I rise in the House today to speak of such a group of people and the important work they do on behalf of our community. Today I would like to congratulate and thank the volunteers, the members and the board of the Humber Valley Village Residents' Association.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking not just as their member of provincial Parliament, but as a resident and a member of Humber Valley Village, so I have witnessed first-hand the outstanding efforts of this dedicated and effective organization and their members, and witnessed their positive impact on our community.

Over the course of the past several years, the Humber Valley Village Residents' Association led the opposition to a proposed development in Humbertown plaza that would have altered the character and quality of life in our

community. They held countless consultations, worked with city officials and developers, and raised funds to ensure that they could be effective advocates on behalf of our community. Eventually, they negotiated with the developer for a smaller development.

More recently, they successfully advocated for a site- and area-specific policy to guide future development of the apartment neighbourhood adjacent to Humbertown plaza. That process is under way, and last month, I attended a consultation hosted by the city on this very topic. Members of the association have been, and will be, playing an active role on this as well.

Humber Valley Village Residents' Association is sustained by an extremely dedicated group of volunteers who are devoted to maintaining a vibrant, prosperous and safe community. Today I rise as their MPP and as a resident to say thank you for all you do for Humber Valley Village and all you do for Etobicoke Centre.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's my honour and privilege to speak on the passage, 10 years ago next month, of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic pupils, commonly known as Sabrina's Law. This bill mandates that every school board create and maintain an anaphylaxis policy to protect our children.

Although I recognized them a few minutes ago, I want to mention the parents of Sabrina, Sara and Mike Shannon, who are here at Queen's Park today to help pay tribute to their daughter and the legislation enacted in her memory.

Prior to Sabrina's Law, children in Ontario's school system had no defence against serious allergies that made attending school dangerous for many. After the tragic passing of Sabrina, members from all three parties recognized that we couldn't allow another young child to suffer from anaphylactic shock because their school was ill-prepared to handle those emergency situations.

Helping to pass Sabrina's Law remains one of the highlights of my time here at Queen's Park. I am certain that other MPPs, both current and former, would say the same thing.

We are grateful that former educator and future Speaker MPP Dave Levac from Brant introduced Bill 3 and saw to it that every member understood the importance of this bill. As a result, it received unanimous support from this assembly.

But the greatest accolades, Sara and Mike, belong to you and your lovely daughter Sabrina. I cannot imagine what it is like to lose a child, but through that tragedy, you worked tirelessly to make Ontario's schools, and schools across North America, safer for all children. It is because of your hard work that since the passing of this law, no child in an Ontario school has died as a result of an allergic reaction.

Although you must miss her dearly each and every day, I know that this law stands as a testament to your courage and commitment, and that the legacy of your wonderful daughter Sabrina will be remembered.

GEMS OF ETOBICOKE-LAKESHORE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to be able to share news with the House of an event hosted in my riding last week: the annual Gems of Etobicoke-Lakeshore awards evening. I held this in conjunction with my local MP, Bernard Trotter.

Gems of Etobicoke-Lakeshore recognizes, honours and celebrates local businesses, organizations and community services located within my riding that deliver outstanding services, provide high-quality products and make remarkable contributions to our community.

Community members and residents submitted hundreds of nominations, and the winners were chosen by a panel of local judges in partnership with our Etobicoke-Lakeshore business improvement areas. The categories were for best restaurant, food service, retail business, cultural and recreational organization, service business, community service and best new business.

These nominations reflect the great commitment that local residents have to supporting the services and products uniquely offered in Etobicoke that make our community a must-see destination. And a characteristic that is shared by all of the exemplary nominees is their sense of community spirit, demonstrated through volunteerism and involvement in local events and initiatives.

The Gems of Etobicoke-Lakeshore offer me a wonderful opportunity every year to recognize outstanding businesses and organizations in my riding. These unique small businesses and groups in our neighbourhoods provide incredible service and deserve to be recognized. They are truly gems, and we want to celebrate those who work to make Etobicoke-Lakeshore an even more vibrant place to live, work and play.

Whether in Etobicoke-Lakeshore or elsewhere, let's all remember to shop locally. It's good for our communities, good for the economy and good for Ontario.

NATIONAL SCHIZOPHRENIA AND PSYCHOSIS AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's my pleasure to rise today in honour of National Schizophrenia and Psychosis Awareness Day, which occurred yesterday. Every year on May 24, schizophrenia societies across the country encourage Canadians to learn more about schizophrenia and psychosis.

I would like to acknowledge members of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario who are watching us today and thank you for your hard work in bringing awareness to this serious illness. By raising awareness, we can reduce the stigma of schizophrenia, which impacts more than 135,000 Ontarians. Stigma and discrimination have been shown to undermine access to health care services, employment and social services, and on average, individuals with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses die 25 years earlier than the average Canadians.

Schizophrenia also takes a toll on the families and the friends of people living with this mental illness. They often become primary caregivers responsible for

providing crisis intervention, encouraging and overseeing support and treatment. Caregivers are a critical part of the mental health support system.

In the past few years, we've seen a noticeable public shift on mental health. It's a subject that is now being openly discussed among the public and policy-makers. From its human toll to its economic impacts, the ramifications of serious mental health issues, including schizophrenia, are being acknowledged.

I'm delighted the government is addressing this issue with the second phase of Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. This phase of the strategy puts a focus on strengthening community health care services and improving access to care.

Finally, I want to thank and acknowledge the great work being carried out by the Toronto East General Hospital, along with WoodGreen and Neighbourhood Link, in supporting individuals suffering from mental illness in my riding of Beaches–East York. Thank you for helping build a better, happier and healthy Ontario.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTING THE SCHOOL YEAR ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ANNÉE SCOLAIRE

Mr. Flynn moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 103, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Durham District School Board, Rainbow District School Board and Peel District School Board, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation / Projet de loi 103, Loi visant à régler les conflits de travail entre les conseils scolaires de district Durham District School Board, Rainbow District School Board et Peel District School Board et la Fédération des enseignantes-enseignants des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice respecting the speedy passage of the bill that I introduced just now, which would ensure that school kids are back in school tomorrow: An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Durham District School Board, the Rainbow District—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? I heard a no.

MOTIONS

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice respecting the speedy passage of the bill that was introduced today, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Durham District School Board—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. This is about putting a motion.

The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? I heard a no.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 12 midnight tonight, Monday, May 25, 2015, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader moves that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 12 midnight tonight, Monday, May 15, 2015, for the purpose of considering government business. Do we agree? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1322 to 1327.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, take your seats, please.

I beg your forgiveness. I misread; I need to reread the motion to ensure that it's properly recorded.

It was moved by the government House leader that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 12 midnight tonight, Monday, May 25, 2015, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

Ayes

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Arnott, Ted | Hoggarth, Ann | Naqvi, Yasir |
| Bailey, Robert | Hunter, Mitzie | Nicholls, Rick |
| Baker, Yvan | Jaczek, Helena | Oraziotti, David |
| Balkissoon, Bas | Jones, Sylvia | Potts, Arthur |
| Ballard, Chris | Kiwala, Sophie | Qaadri, Shafiq |
| Barrett, Toby | Lalonde, Marie-France | Rinaldi, Lou |
| Berardinetti, Lorenzo | Leal, Jeff | Sandals, Liz |
| Bradley, James J. | MacCharles, Tracy | Scott, Laurie |
| Chan, Michael | Malhi, Harinder | Sergio, Mario |
| Chiarelli, Bob | Martins, Cristina | Smith, Todd |

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Clark, Steve | Martow, Gila | Sousa, Charles |
| Colle, Mike | Matthews, Deborah | Takhar, Harinder S. |
| Coteau, Michael | Mauro, Bill | Thibeault, Glenn |
| Crack, Grant | McDonnell, Jim | Thompson, Lisa M. |
| Damerla, Dipika | McGarry, Kathryn | Vernile, Daiene |
| Del Duca, Steven | McMahon, Eleanor | Walker, Bill |
| Delaney, Bob | McMeekin, Ted | Wilson, Jim |
| Dickson, Joe | McNaughton, Monte | Wong, Soo |
| Dong, Han | Meilleur, Madeleine | Wynne, Kathleen O. |
| Dunlop, Garfield | Milczyn, Peter Z. | Yakabuski, John |
| Fedeli, Victor | Miller, Norm | Yurek, Jeff |
| Flynn, Kevin Daniel | Moridi, Reza | Zimmer, David |
| Fraser, John | Murray, Glen R. | |
| Hardeman, Ernie | Naidoo-Harris, Indira | |

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

Nays

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Armstrong, Teresa J. | Gélinas, France | Natyshak, Taras |
| Bisson, Gilles | Gretzky, Lisa | Sattler, Peggy |
| Fife, Catherine | Hatfield, Percy | Singh, Jagmeet |
| Forster, Cindy | Horwath, Andrea | Tabuns, Peter |
| French, Jennifer K. | Mantha, Michael | Taylor, Monique |
| Gates, Wayne | Miller, Paul | Vanthof, John |

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 70; the nays are 18.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: As members may be aware, three local strikes by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation have closed secondary schools in the Durham District School Board, the Rainbow District School Board and the Peel District School Board. The longest strike, the labour dispute at the Durham District School Board, has been ongoing since April 20 of this year. These strikes affect more than 70,000 students in Ontario, and these students are apprehensive about losing their school year.

The Minister of Education informed me today that she has received notification from the ERC, the Education Relations Commission, that, in its opinion, it has determined that the successful completion of courses of study of the affected students in each of the affected school boards is now in jeopardy.

The most profound negative aspects of this labour dispute have severe implications on those who are not directly involved in it, namely, the students who have no control over the course of this dispute. They know that they are the ones who are most affected by this dispute, yet they're unable to do anything about it. They're looking to us in this House for assistance.

As a responsible government, we have no choice. We must act to protect the interests of the students. The continuation of this dispute and the resulting disruption in education and its corresponding effects give rise to

very serious public interest concerns. That is why I have introduced the Protecting the School Year Act, 2015.

We must act now. The ERC has consulted the affected parties and has concluded that there is no early prospect of a settlement of the local agreements in each of the three local boards that I mentioned. Certainly, none can be achieved within sufficient time to avoid jeopardizing the school year of the affected students.

If passed, this bill would get students back into their classrooms and end the labour dispute. We don't want the students to be penalized any further because of labour disputes between teachers and their local school boards.

The bill I've introduced would provide an end to the labour disputes. It would get students back into their classrooms, it would order the school board to resume normal operations immediately after the act comes into force, and it would put a stop to the strike action currently under way by the teachers.

If the respective school boards and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the OSSTF, have not resolved the local issues in dispute before the date that the act would receive royal assent, all outstanding issues in the dispute between them in respect of local bargaining would immediately be referred to fair and balanced binding mediation-arbitration, as recommended by the Education Relations Commission.

The bill would also provide for maximum penalties on both sides: \$2,000 for individuals and \$25,000 for either the board or the union for non-compliance. Each day of non-compliance would be considered a separate offence.

Everyone in this House wants the parties to reach a negotiated settlement. They want them to achieve a quick ending to the labour dispute.

We want school boards and employees' bargaining agents to be able to negotiate fair and reasonable agreements, but this must be done without putting students' school year in jeopardy. However, we must also be prepared to act if necessary. That is what we're accomplishing by introducing this act today.

Let me tell you, Speaker, that we're doing this reluctantly. However, the public interest demands that we do this expeditiously. I remind members that we've received notification from the Education Relations Commission stating that the students' school year in the affected school boards is now in jeopardy, as I speak.

For that reason, I ask all members to support this legislation for quick passage so that we can be sure our children's education will get back to normal in the province, in these three school boards, as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses. The member from Simcoe North.

Oh, I'm sorry. Are you standing for statements by ministries?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Yes, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. Minister of Finance for a statement by ministries.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans—

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: No? Am I wrong on this one, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're in the middle of statements and responses. There is no other statement. I'm going to defer to the member from Simcoe North for responses.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

On April 20, when 24,000 students were locked out of the classroom in Durham, I stood up in this House during question period and asked the Minister of Education about the 24,000 students in Durham. I asked the Minister of Education what she was going to say to those students who want to learn, and what she was going to say the parents who want to see them succeed in the classroom. For the last five weeks, she did nothing and said nothing; dithered and drawled on as she blamed local boards at every chance she got.

But the buck stops with her and the government. For six weeks, as two more school boards and 48,000 more students were impacted, the Minister of Education did nothing to ensure that the students' year was saved. She used them as pawns in a blame game and kept them locked out of the classroom as she failed to negotiate in good faith.

While she has allowed the education of the students from Durham, Rainbow and Peel to spin into chaos, the Ontario PC caucus has been consistent in our position that the most important issue in the current dispute with the OSSTF is the education of students and the need to get them back in class as quickly as possible—an urgency the Liberal government did not share.

With great reluctance, the Ontario PC caucus will be supporting quick passage of the proposed back-to-work legislation.

High school students in these three boards must be able to return to class at the first opportunity to complete their studies. Most importantly, those students in grade 12 must—must—be able to participate in end-of-year activities and graduate in order to ensure they are prepared for college or university, or to enter the workforce.

I must reiterate that we are supporting the legislation reluctantly. The legislation will only ameliorate a bad situation that has been created by your government's failed two-tiered disaster of a bargaining process, as outlined in Bill 122, and by your government's inability to reach a negotiated settlement. Your government, your ministry and the Ministry of Education must recognize the fundamental flaws in Bill 122 that have led to the chaos in our education system.

There are many Ontario school boards yet to successfully to negotiate collective agreements. Without any delay, you should introduce legislation to fix the dysfunctional bargaining process that your government has put in place. Believe me: Unless this is fixed, we're going to have absolute turmoil by September 1.

You must fix this system. You must introduce legislation to immediately clarify and fix this bargaining mess. It is absolutely imperative that we ensure that the

chaos now experienced by high school students in Durham, Peel and Rainbow will not spread to the rest of the Ontario's education system.

If the process outlined in Bill 122 is allowed to continue, there is no doubt in my mind that more labour unrest will follow. I just can't believe for a second, if we think that this bill today, even if we time-allocate it or we get unanimous consent—for sure there will be turmoil in the education system.

It's not just the boards, the union locals and the provincial unions that are impacted by the lack of clarity and confusion from Bill 122. In fact, the obscure commission you relied on to tell you the school year was in jeopardy has also been affected by this legislation. A commission once independent from negotiations is now an arm's-length organization of the biggest party in the negotiations.

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Bill 122 has led to an absurd blame game where the government blames everyone but themselves and fails to take any responsibility—and we knew that over and over again. But in the end, it is the students who are impacted the most by the failed system in Bill 122. It is the students who have been held out of the classroom. It is the students who have missed their concerts. It is the students who have missed their games. It is the students who didn't know if they would graduate. It is the students who feared they wouldn't make it to college or university. It is the students you have hurt the most with Bill 122.

You pandered for years and kicked the can down the road, but now you have run out of road. If you don't get your house in order, I am certain this won't be the last piece of back-to-work legislation you will be introducing.

I want to say, on behalf of our young leader, Patrick Brown, and I would like to read—

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm not sure what they're yelling at over there, Mr. Speaker. I just said I want to bring something from Mr. Brown:

"The Ontario PC caucus, and in particular the PC education critic, Garfield Dunlop"—I'm not bragging about that—"has been consistent in its position that the most important issue in this current dispute with OSSTF is the education of students and the need to get them back" in the classroom "as quickly as possible. As such, the Ontario PC caucus will be supporting the quick passage of the proposed back-to-work legislation.

"High school students affected by the strike must be able to return to class immediately to complete their studies at this critical juncture in the school year. In particular"—and remember, we've only got 25 days left in the school year right now, Mr. Speaker. "In particular, grade 12 students must be able to participate in end-of-year activities and graduate in order to go on to post-secondary studies or enter the workforce....

"I trust your government has recognized the fundamental flaws in Bill 122 that have led to the current situation. As there are other Ontario school boards yet to

successfully negotiate a collective agreement, I would ask you to immediately fix the dysfunctional bargaining process that your government has put in place to ensure that the chaos now experienced by high school students in Durham, Peel and Sudbury will not spread to the rest of Ontario's educational system."

I say that on behalf of Patrick Brown, the leader of the Ontario PC Party. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm proud to be able to rise on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic caucus to speak to this back-to-work legislation.

Speaker, parents and students and educators and educational workers in this province have a right to be frustrated. Liberal education cuts are undermining the ability of students to learn, resulting in closed schools, fewer classroom supports, decreased access to special education, and strikes and work-to-rule campaigns by teachers who would much rather be in the classrooms.

On top of this, teachers, educational workers and educational assistants are all being fired across this province. These cuts hurt Ontario's students, and these cuts undermine our teachers and educational workers' ability to do their jobs and provide the best possible education for our kids.

So, here we are, Speaker: Once again, this Liberal government has thrown Ontario's school system into chaos, and it's students and parents who are left paying the price.

This should come as no surprise. For months we've been hearing from parents and teachers expressing their concerns about Liberal cuts to education and what it means for their kids' education. Students have been out of the classroom in Durham since April 20, in Sudbury since April 27, and in Peel since May 4. All the while, the government has sat on the sidelines perplexed and confused.

This is a Premier who campaigned on promises of fixing the bargaining process, of repairing the damage done in our schools by Bill 115. You remember that bill, Speaker: Bill 115. In fact, we elected Catherine Fife as a result of the mess that the Liberals made with Bill 115—of their cynical ploy to try to gain a majority government at the expense of teachers and students and families. In reality, this Premier and this government have no respect for teachers, they have no respect for students, they have no respect for parents, and they certainly have no respect for collective bargaining. Just like with Bill 115, the government has shown that it prefers, rather, to legislate, because they are unwilling to negotiate.

Make no mistake: This is only the beginning. This government is making it clear that it will legislate anything that it fails to negotiate in good faith.

The Minister of Education and Premier claim that these are local issues, but with the breakdown of central talks with OSSTF and ETFO, the government must take responsibility for throwing our schools into chaos. They have created this mess. They have now finally been flushed out on the irresponsible way that they've behaved

with this process. They have done nothing to fix the mess that they have created. They should have been working to fix the problems before we got to this point. Instead, they let this chaos drag on week after week after week—not because it's good for students, not because it's good for parents, not because it's good for educational workers and teachers, but because the Liberals think it might be good for them. They think it might be good for them to go down to the wire and then try to ram something through this Legislature with a unanimous consent motion, and New Democrats will not—will not—allow that to happen. But that's the usual way the Liberals do things: It's all about them and it's not about the right thing for Ontarians.

Look, we know we can't stop the government from passing this legislation. They have a majority; they're going to do that. They're going to do that within the next couple of days; there's no doubt about it. But we also know that the Liberals have not learned a single thing since Bill 115. Again they have failed parents. Again they have failed students. Again they have failed teachers. Once again, they are cynically playing political football with students and families.

Actually, parents who haven't seen question period yet should watch the rerun tonight, because that minister literally lobbed it over to the other side, which shows how cynical that minister and that government are.

Speaker, the bottom line is that this is a Liberal mess. This is plain and simple a Liberal mess. It is a Liberal leopard that has not changed its spots. It is creating chaos in our education system again. It has done it in the past, and sadly, we know from past behaviour and current behaviour that this will always be the behaviour of the Liberals, as long as it's politically helpful for them. It doesn't matter about anyone else.

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

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

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

"Whereas the Green Energy Act has driven up the cost of electricity in Ontario due to unrealistic subsidies for certain energy sources, including the world's highest subsidies for solar power; and

"Whereas this cost is passed on to ratepayers through the global adjustment, which can account for almost half of a ratepayer's hydro bill; and

"Whereas the high cost of energy is severely impacting the quality of life of Ontario's residents, especially fixed-income seniors; and

"Whereas it is imperative to remedy Liberal mismanagement in the energy sector by implementing immediate reforms detailed in the Ontario PC white paper Paths to Prosperity—Affordable Energy;

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

“To immediately repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009, and all other statutes that artificially inflate the cost of electricity with the aim of bringing down electricity rates and abolishing expensive surcharges such as the global adjustment and debt retirement charges.”

I fully support it, will affix my signature and send it with page Sheila.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Cindy Forster: “Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

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

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

I support this petition and affix my signature.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It is entitled “Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water” and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It’s my pleasure to sign and to support this petition and to send it down with page Brady.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015;

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn’t necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act;

“Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating;

“Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

“Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

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

“To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses.”

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to save the ODSP Work-Related Benefit.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the \$100 ODSP Work-Related Benefit provides a critically important source of funds to people with disabilities on ODSP who work, giving them the ability to pay for much-needed, ongoing work-related expenses such as transportation, clothing, food, personal care and hygiene items, and child care; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Community and Social Services plans to eliminate the Work-Related Benefit as part of a restructuring of OW and ODSP employment benefits, and has said that ongoing work-related expenses will not be covered by its new restructured Employment-Related Benefit; and

“Whereas eliminating the Work-Related Benefit will take approximately \$36 million annually out of the

pockets of people with disabilities on ODSP who work; and

“Whereas a survey conducted by the ODSP Action Coalition between December 2014 and February 2015 shows that 18% of respondents who currently receive the Work-Related Benefit fear having to quit their jobs as a result of the loss of this important source of funds; 12.5% fear having to reduce the amount of money they spend on food, or rely on food banks; and 10% fear losing the ability to travel, due to the cost of transportation; and

“Whereas people receiving ODSP already struggle to get by, and incomes on ODSP provide them with little or no ability to cover these costs from regular benefits; and

“Whereas undermining employment among ODSP recipients would run directly counter to the ministry’s goal of increasing employment and the provincial government’s poverty reduction goal of increasing income security;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the provincial government’s plan to eliminate the ODSP Work-Related Benefit.”

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

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees access to publicly funded French-language education; and

“Whereas there are more than 1,000 children attending French elementary schools in east Toronto (Beaches–East York and Toronto–Danforth) and those numbers continue to grow; and

“Whereas there is no French secondary school (grades 7-12) yet in east Toronto, requiring students wishing to continue their studies in French school boards to travel two hours every day to attend the closest French secondary school, while several English schools in east Toronto sit half-empty since there are no requirements or incentives for school boards to release underutilized schools to other boards in need; and

“Whereas it is well documented that children leave the French-language system for the English-language system between grades 7 and 9 due to the inaccessibility of French-language secondary schools, and that it is also well established that being educated in French at the elementary level is not sufficient to solidify French-language skills for life; and

“Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged in February 2007 that there is an important shortage of French-language schools in all of Toronto and even provided funds to open some secondary schools, and yet, not a single French secondary school has opened in east Toronto; and

“Whereas the commissioner of French-language services stated in a report in June 2011 that ‘... time is running out to address the serious shortage of at least one

new French-language school at the secondary level in the eastern part of the city of Toronto’; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has confirmed that we all benefit when school board properties are used effectively in support of publicly funded education and that the various components of our education system should be aligned to serve the needs of students....;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario... :

“That the Minister of Education assist one or both French school boards in locating a suitable underutilized school building in east Toronto that may be sold or shared for the purpose of opening a French secondary school (grades 7-12) in the community by September 2015, so that French students have a secondary school close to where they live.”

WIND TURBINES

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

“Whereas an industrial wind turbine development is to be constructed approximately 3.5 kilometres west of the village of Crysler by EDP Renewables; and

“Whereas the project will consist of 25-50 mega wind turbines and this has raised concerns by the citizens of Crysler and surrounding area related to health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approval;

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

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments, and the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I agree with this and will sign it and pass it off to page Brady.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: It’s my pleasure to present a petition that was signed by Micheline Lacroix, who’s a resident of my riding; she actually lives on my street. It goes as follows:

“Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return” and you will “lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals” and you will “lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario....

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

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

LEGAL AID

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I have a petition for population-based legal services funding:

“Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

“Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

“Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide” legal “funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

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

“That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds in the 2012-13 budget, and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner.”

I sign my name to the petition and I give it to page Maya.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

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

“Whereas the Ontario government’s proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) is a mandatory pension plan which would target small businesses and their employees; and

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“Whereas there has been little to no discussion on what the costs would be, or who would pay them; and

“Whereas affected businesses would be hit with up to \$1,643 per employee, per year in new payroll taxes starting in 2017; and

“Whereas affected employees would have up to \$1,643 per year extra deducted from their paycheques, and it would take 40 years for them to see the full pension benefits; and

“Whereas the Canadian Federation of Independent Business predicts the unemployment rate in Ontario would rise by 0.5%, and there would be a reduction in wages over the longer term; and

“Whereas all of these costs would be shouldered exclusively by small businesses and their employees; and

“Whereas public sector and big business employees who already have a pension plan will not be asked to pay into the plan;

“We, the undersigned, do not support implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and petition the government of Ontario to axe the pension tax.”

I fully support, will affix my signature and send it with page Sheila.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I present this petition signed by Mike Brady of Garrison, Ontario.

“Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

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

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

I sign my name to this petition and give it to page Bridget to deliver.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here that’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

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

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I agree with this petition. I’m going to affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Julien.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES RÉGIMES DE PENSION AGRÉÉS COLLECTIFS

Mr. Sousa moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 57, Loi créant un cadre pour les régimes de pension agréés collectifs et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I assume the minister wishes to lead off the debate?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's my honour to stand today in the House for third reading of Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this government has undertaken significant reforms to the retirement income system in Ontario. In 2008, the report of the Expert Commission on Pensions laid out a comprehensive blueprint for pension reform. It also encouraged a national discussion on improvements to the system. The report included recommendations to modernize and strengthen pension laws in Ontario through the Pension Benefits Act, which had not been updated in more than 20 years. That's exactly what we did. This government passed two pension reform bills, and many of the new regulations required to implement the provisions have been approved by the government or are under way.

Then, in 2010, Ontario released a discussion paper on the possible approaches to strengthen the retirement income system. The recommendations included a fully funded CPP enhancement, supplemented by pension innovation, to expand retirement savings arrangements and reduce their costs.

In 2012, the government extended the solvency funding relief for private sector pension plans provided in 2009 for a further three years, helping employers manage their pension costs. Temporary solvency funding relief was also provided to public sector defined benefit pension plans, provided they took steps to put their plans on a more sustainable track.

In the 2013 Ontario budget, Ontario indicated that it would move forward to introduce innovative pension models such as PRPPs. Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015, is fulfilling that commitment. As you know, Mr. Speaker, pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, are a new type of voluntary, low-cost, tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicle. They're a new retirement savings option that would make it easier for Ontario employees and the self-employed to save for retirement.

PRPPs are savings plans designed to provide retirement income for individuals who pay into them. Individuals have their own individual accounts, into which contributions are made. Contributions are locked in, and benefits at retirement are based on accumulated contributions and investment returns. Similar to other tax-assisted savings vehicles such as registered retirement savings plans, or RRSPs, individuals would not pay income tax on their PRPP contributions and the investment returns until they withdraw their funds.

But PRPPs differ from RRSPs in a number of important steps:

—Individuals' accounts are pooled for investment purposes.

—Contributions are locked in until an individual reaches retirement age, and legislation requires that PRPPs be provided at low cost.

—Administrators are held to a higher legal standard of care.

Similar to registered pension plan contributions, employer PRPP contributions are tax-deductible. They're also not subject to the employer health tax, employment insurance premiums, CPP contributions or workers' compensation premiums. This can result in lower taxes and withholdings than one of a group of RRSPs.

The 2014 Ontario budget committed to introducing a legislative framework for pooled registered pension plans in the fall of 2014, and we did exactly that. The federal government has already implemented PRPPs for sectors under federal jurisdiction such as employees in the banking, interprovincial transportation and communications sectors. The federal legislation also applies to persons employed or self-employed in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

The federal Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act and associated regulations came into force on December 14, 2012. It enables corporations such as banks and insurance companies to be the administrators of PRPPs, and sets out rules for establishing and administering PRPPs.

But legislation must be passed by each province before PRPPs can be made available to individuals employed in provincially regulated sectors and to self-employed individuals working in the province. As a result, PRPPs will not be available to the majority of Ontarians until legislation is passed by this House and proclaimed into force once supporting regulations have been made.

The purpose of the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015, is to provide a legal framework for the establishment and administration of PRPPs in Ontario. It would apply to individuals employed in provincially regulated businesses and the self-employed in Ontario, as well as individuals employed in federally regulated industries in Ontario whose employers do not offer PRPPs.

Bill 57 largely adopts the federal framework, but this proposed legislation, Bill 57, includes Ontario-specific features where provincial law and/or processes are required to apply or where additional provisions are required for added clarity or consistency with Ontario's minimum pension standards legislation.

In practice, we might expect PRPPs to work as follows: Employers who choose to offer PRPPs to their employees would be responsible for selecting and entering into a contract with a third-party PRPP administrator such as a bank or insurance company. The administrator would then be responsible for managing PRPP investments and for communicating with plan members on matters relating to their PRPP.

If an employer chooses to offer a PRPP, an employee would be automatically enrolled within it, but the employee can then choose to opt out. Employee contributions to the PRPP would be made through automatic paycheque deductions. The employer would be required to deduct and remit their employees' contributions to the administrator.

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Individuals who do not participate in a workplace PRPP, such as self-employed individuals, would be able to enrol themselves into a PRPP of their choice. In this case, an individual would contact a PRPP administrator to join a plan and would make the contributions through an automatic payment plan with their financial institution.

Each administrator would be responsible for designing its PRPP. A plan administrator could choose to offer one or multiple PRPPs, depending on its marketing strategy and whether it sought to tailor its PRPP for specific employees. Administrators would have the option of including different investment options to reflect the varying risk preferences of the members. A default option would be applied to members who did not make a choice on an investment option within a specific time frame.

In order to administer a PRPP, a corporation would be first required to obtain a licence to operate as a PRPP administrator. To do so, the corporation would need to satisfy conditions that will be set out in regulation.

This government recognizes that increasing retirement savings in the province is a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. Establishing pooled registered pension plans is just one step in our plan, which will encourage investment in voluntary retirement savings tools. That is why I ask the members of this assembly to support the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This is a time-allocated motion; there are no questions and comments.

Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm very pleased to be able to have a few minutes in which to offer some comments on third reading of Bill 57.

As I think I have stated before in earlier sections of the debate, this is a particularly important bill, in my view, because I introduced it in April 2013 as a private member's bill. I was looking back at the debate at the time when that took place, and it was clear from one of the members of the government that the government was going to support this. Equally, I'm here to support Bill 57 today. As a private member, to see one's private member's bill then morph into part of the budget a few weeks later was certainly something that I appreciated.

I want to talk for a few moments about how we got here in terms of this as a tool. As the minister has mentioned, there is a very distinct legal relationship between the government and the individual provinces in order to create the pooled part of this title and of this pension plan

because, as I will explain in a moment, it has become increasingly the interest of other countries in the world looking at pension plans that exist in this country and in the various provinces.

Pension plans have taken a spike in general public understanding and, in some cases, confusion. The idea was that by 2012, the federal government had introduced companion legislation; that meant that the individual province that wished to participate in a pooled registered plan would have to create legislation that was complimentary to that which the federal government had introduced.

What happened, then, in the next couple of years: Quebec has already launched its version of a pooled registered pension plan and BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan all have legislation. I think it's really a demonstration of the importance of finding new tools for people to save. The various provinces have taken advantage of the federal leadership, and I certainly want to compliment this government on joining those other provinces that have worked to make this another saving tool.

I just want explain a little bit about why this has come up. I've said that pensions have suddenly acquired a new interest by people who (a) have one and are worried about it, (b) don't have one and are worried about it, and (c) are concerned about the possibility of the mandatory nature of the Ontario choice.

So why has the issue come up so much on pensions? There are four things which have all played a role, and one is that we all live longer. That point between when you retire and when you die has changed dramatically in the last few decades. We live longer, we retire earlier, and anyone who has any understanding of mortgage interest rates and market interest rates will know that the return on investment has been stalled for the last few years. Pensions were always built on, first of all, life expectancy and the space between life expectancy and retirement.

They also made robust investments, and the money from those investments went to pay the people who were retiring. Very often the value of the pension differed dramatically according to where you worked and what kind of arrangement was made. It could be the value of your contributions over your lifespan, over your working lifespan, or it might be the best five years. So there's a huge variation in the amount of money that's available to come back to pensioners. It was in light of that and a number of initiatives that other governments have taken on that we have the concern today about pensions, and some of the imperatives like life expectancy and return on investment have to be dealt with. The sooner you do that, the better people are going to feel some security in the pension plan and the pension plan they might have or wish to have.

I would say that PRPPs, the pooled registered pensions, are an essential addition to retirement savings options. They are similar to a defined contribution plan in the amount of money that is determined as your contribution; however, the employer contributions are not mandatory.

A PRPP pools, as the name implies, the contributions together to achieve lower investment management and administration costs. This is something that is very appealing because in today's computer world it's very easy for a company with the administrative responsibility of these pension plans to have people enrolled. The amount of money going in is standardized by the employer, and the whole thing, as a transaction, can be done in moments. Obviously, when you're able to make those kinds of adjustments in moments, it means the administrative cost is significantly lower.

PRPPs can be offered to employers and to self-employed persons as well. The PRPP supplier takes responsibility for the employee relationship, and when an employee changes jobs, he can move the PRPP to the new employer. That's very important because, as we know, the mobility of employees today is significant. They change jobs either voluntarily or otherwise at a regular rate. They find work in another province or something like that, and they need to know that this little pot of money that's growing is theirs, and it's in their name, and they can take it anywhere in the country. So it's a convenient pension plan, it's portable and it's registered to the employee.

I think that as we look at the younger generation we see that people stay in jobs for a much briefer time than they used to. It's important, then, for this younger, more mobile generation to have access to a portable pension plan that is their own, which is why it's registered, than be tied to a company pension plan. If a younger person has five to 10 jobs from ages 25 to 50, it doesn't make sense to have a patchwork of pensions. Rather, it makes much more sense for that person to have a consistent pooled registered pension plan that they can take to each new job.

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People might ask, "Why not RRSPs?" Pooled pensions offer a strong alternative to RRSPs because they are considerably less to administer than is possible with an RRSP. This large-scale potential investment process with the pooled pension is certainly better.

It's interesting, too, to have spoken with representatives of Ontario's financial industries and banks. I mentioned that they can offer transactions in a moment. They see the pooled registered plan as an attractive product they want to be able to offer. They know how difficult it is for people to feel comfortable about saving, and understanding what the choices are and looking at some of the obstacles they have.

The pooled pension is designed to take away those obstacles, to provide people with an option to save that they can take with them to a new employer in a participating province. They certainly make savings easier and will most likely encourage people to save who may not be doing so now. Since the money is taken away—it's a reverse option within 60 days. We know that people get used to the idea and they're much more likely to maintain their contributions instead of backing out.

Business stakeholders have long held the PRPP as superior to standard pension plans because it is voluntary

for employers. If an employer should choose to contribute to an employee's PRPP, their contributions are deducted as an expense. That means they are not required to pay CPP or any applicable payroll taxes on the contribution, and unlike an RRSP, contributions to a pooled pension also do not count as a taxable income to the employee. In the economic uncertainty of today, it is obvious that pooled registered plans can benefit both employees and business owners. It's definitely a win-win situation.

Back in 2012, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business surveyed their members. The survey found that 80% of small business owners do not have a retirement plan in place for themselves or their employees, but 34% would consider participating in a PRPP if it was available. I think that the fact that it's not requiring onsite administration, which is an additional burden to the cost of the employer, again makes this a useful tool.

In a submission to the government, the CFIB explicitly supported PRPPs over the proposed Ontario pension: "CFIB is pleased that the province of Ontario is holding consultations on implementing a pooled registered pension plan since, from a small business perspective, a pooled registered plan "is a much more favourable option than mandatory increases in CPP premiums or mandatory contributions to a new Ontario pension plan."

CFIB has publicly supported the idea as "a voluntary, low-cost and administratively simple retirement mechanism. If properly designed, the PRPP has the potential of expanding pension coverage by attracting employers, employees and the self-employed" who currently do not have a pension plan. I think that's really an important feature that business recognizes in this.

The other thing I mentioned right at the beginning was that other jurisdictions are looking at ways by which they could modify and still have a viable vehicle for savings for employees, and one that is interesting to look at is that of the United Kingdom, which is referred to as the NEST. It introduced these changes in 2008, and the former Labour government made it mandatory for employers to offer this workplace pension plan that, in Britain's case, both employers and employees contribute to. The NEST—the National Employment Savings Trust—was established in 2010 as a national pension scheme open to any employer who wants to use it to satisfy his workplace pension duty. Since its inception in 2012, it has been growing. From 2013-14, the number of employers offering NEST increased from 347 to 4,692, and membership increased from 80,000 to over a million members. It gives you a sense, then, of the kind of opportunity that pooling and registering a pension plan can offer, and certainly the NEST is a really good model for us to look at.

The NEST pension scheme is run by the NEST Corp. It decides how the scheme is run and how they invest contributions. It is accountable to Parliament through the Department for Work and Pensions, but it is not part of the government. It is run independently and works for pensioners. As they say, "We're here to make money for

you, not us.” I think that’s something that we always have to keep in mind whenever we’re looking at the different models of providing savings or a pension: They have to understand who the customer is.

Anyway, NEST, like CPP, gets the best returns—many of which are outside of the UK, just as CPP has investments around the world. Some of the top 10 companies include Apple, Exxon Mobil, Google, Microsoft, Royal Dutch Shell and Nestlé. It’s interesting to note that 8% of its shares are in UK companies, 17.4% are European, and nearly 55% are North American. So NEST invests in the best interests of its pensioners, as would a pooled registered pension plan in this province.

I mentioned the CPP, and just to give you a contrast, it also heavily invests in foreign assets. According to a 2013 CBC report, the fund behind Canada’s largest single-purpose pension was worth just over \$170 billion by the end of 2012, up from \$152 billion in 2011. So it’s not a perfect contrast, but it gives you a sense of the fact that other jurisdictions are looking at the same parameters, the same imperatives of lifespan and return on interest and things like that, to make sure we find something that’s going to be a good comparison and one that we can work from. So I think that in the UK’s example, employees can bring it from one workplace to another, move within the UK and still have access, in the same way that ours is contemplated.

As the minister mentioned, each administrator has the opportunity to offer a diverse array of funds to suit the investor, and I think this is really important, particularly for people of different ages.

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I mentioned a moment ago about the importance of coming up with a modern pension style for younger people whose work is likely to take them to several employers, and in the same way they have different kinds of needs in their investment portfolios. So the administrators have the opportunity to look at what suits the employees best, and one of them can be divided by how old you are and how your priorities change as the decades flow.

The other thing we have to look at is portability and choice of investment. This would create an ideal scenario for Ontarians who wish to invest and might not already be doing so. By making investing easy and portable, and offering choice, I think you can see that the NEST example gives you an idea of what Ontario’s PRPP could do to encourage people to save for retirement.

I mentioned the issue around the Ontario pension, but there are some very interesting quotations from different people with regard to the importance of the pooled pension plan as a contrast to the Ontario pension.

In 2012, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce submitted a letter to then-Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, calling on the government to introduce legislation to implement PRPPs. They said, “We hope you believe, as we do, that PRPPs will help strengthen the retirement income system in Ontario.” When we’re able to stand here for third reading, I think the message has obviously made it through the years and the changes in finance ministers.

In 2012, the CFIB urged Finance Minister Duncan to move quickly to implement pooled registered pension plans. The whole idea then was that PRPPs address some of the problems with current pension tools by promoting lower fees and shifting the administrative burden from employers to financial institutions.

I want to explain why that keeps coming up and why it’s important. In small businesses, no one is able to afford to have that level of expertise on-site, or it’s not something they do all the time. Handing those responsibilities off to an administrator gives small business the opportunity to spend its time and the time of its employees and their expertise on what they do well, instead of having to find somebody with some time to organize this kind of administration. It’s really important that the administrative burden is part of the administration of this centrally, as opposed to making it a burden for employers.

If we jump up to 2014, again more interest in PRPPs. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the CGA—the Certified General Accountants of Ontario—did a consultation with employers on pension reform and found again that they were firmly in favour of PRPPs. Another response came from Dean Connor, president and CEO of Sun Life Financial. He said, “I don’t think we need to, or should, mandate additional retirement saving, but I am in favour of the kind of universal coverage with opt-out choice that the Quebec version of PRPP provides.”

In the few moments I have left, I just want to review for people why our caucus is supporting this. First of all, it is now about three years that we’ve been asking for it, but mostly there are some key ideas here. Participation is voluntary. An employee will have 60 days to opt out of a PRPP, and voluntary contributions by employers—I can see where, in a competitive market, that might be something that an employer would look to as an incentive to retain and maintain employees.

Contributions are locked in until an individual reaches retirement age, which has been deemed 55, and the individuals’ accounts are pooled for investment purposes. That means a low cost and better investment. PRPPs provide professional investment management at a low cost to plan members by pooling the funds of all individual accounts for investment purposes, as well as limiting the investment options provided to plan members. I go back to the example I gave of NEST and how many millions of pounds it has become in a very short period of time. It is that contribution and that kind of investment numbers of people that are sure to make this a well-funded opportunity for people. Similar to registered pension plan contributions, employer PRPP contributions, as well as employee contributions, are tax-deductible.

The Portfolio Management Association of Canada has written to the government in support of PRPPs, and I want to read the excerpt from its letter to Minister Hunter:

“We are pleased that Ontario has recognized the advantages of a PRPP program and has moved forward with PRPP legislation. PRPPs provide the opportunity to

participate in a simple and straightforward pension plan. PMAC has been an active supporter of the development of the PRPP federal framework and believe it is a better retirement savings vehicle versus comprehensive or overhaul changes to CPP or the ORPP.

“We believe that PRPPs provide more flexibility and choice for Canadians and their employers in how they save for retirement and leverage off the existing infrastructure around the administration of similar plans.

“By leveraging off the existing systems/staffing/training and servicing resources that many financial institutions have already developed in virtually all the cities and towns in Canada this will seemingly greatly accelerate the rollout time to launch PRPPs and ultimately improve overall cost effectiveness (i.e. same resources already in place servicing the \$100 billion in the 50,000 DC,” or defined-contribution, “and GRRSP,” or group registered retirement savings plans, “and the hundreds of billions in individual RRSP plans serviced by some of these entities so these costs can be spread over this existing asset base). This will also further strengthen the three pillars around retirement funding for Canadians.

“It is important for governments at the two senior levels in Canada to realize that there are other safety nets besides pension plans. In addition to the \$1.6 trillion in pension assets in Canada and the non-registered savings of Canadians, the RRSP/RRIF/TFSA pool of assets now exceeds \$1.4 trillion. As at 2012, these registered plans are growing almost \$70 billion a year on new contributions alone.”

Clearly, there is a strong case, then, for us having the registered retirement plan.

One of the last quotes I will give: “Modernizing our retirement income system to ensure Canadians can save more for their retirement is among the most important jobs for governments today. Without action, future retirees in Canada will not have the same opportunities as were available in the past for accumulating adequate income for retirement. This is why the Association of Canadian Pension Management (ACPM) has championed the concept of pooled registered pension plans.... ACPM believes that this kind of innovative new arrangement is key to creating the kind of retirement security that working Canadians deserve.”

I think that the last quote, from the Association of Canadian Pension Management, certainly focuses on the issue. We need to modernize our retirement income system to ensure it is sustainable and makes sense for future generations. As the reality of employment and workplaces change, with employees switching jobs more frequently, we need to ensure that we create a saving culture. The PRPP would surely go farther in promoting a saving culture, rather than an ORPP, which will be mandatory and will not give people a choice in their retirement savings plan.

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Today, if Ontario passes PRPP legislation, almost 90% of Canadians will have access to pooled registered plans. This will likely lower the costs, increase the poten-

tial purchasing power of the plans, and reduce barriers of interprovincial movement and trade. We need Ontario to be part of the Canadian PRPP landscape, as the more contributors to a pension plan, the better the investment, meaning a healthy pension plan.

Currently, there are many pensions with an unfunded liability, meaning that if the pension fund were to be wrapped up today, it would not be able to fulfill its payment promises.

PRPPs are a promising addition to the array of retirement savings options that are available to Ontarians and Canadians. We need PRPPs, not an ORPP. PRPPs are mobile and in the employee’s name; the PRPP can go where they go. They are low-cost, have simple administration and are voluntary.

I fully support the passage of Bill 57 and encourage all Ontarians, especially those without a pension, to consider investing in a PRPP.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to the minister for the opportunity to rise in the Legislature today and speak to this bill, Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act.

As I’ve noted before, the title of this bill is a bit misleading. To refer to the financial products that this legislation will establish as pensions would be like calling a fire sale of Hydro One “asset optimization.” Oh, that’s right; you’re doing that as well. The point is, the title misrepresents the intention of the bill. Pensions, or at least the way we traditionally refer to pensions, are designed to benefit their members and their members alone. PRPPs, however, are a financial product. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with financial products, but there is something concerning about the way that the government has attempted to package these plans.

Ontarians are experiencing a retirement security crisis. We’ve heard the government say this time and time again. But their decision to prioritize their private PRPP legislation over a public option shows that the government has their priorities are out of order.

Ontarians deserve stability and security in retirement, and they deserve to know that the money they invest isn’t going to be cannibalized by fees. Generally speaking, in a private plan such as PRPPs, individuals can expect to lose roughly half of their benefit to fees over their lifetime. Mr. Speaker, this is not an insignificant amount. It can mean the difference between security in retirement and struggling to get by.

Over the past six months, the government has consistently referred to PRPPs as voluntary options or, in other words, a choice—and who doesn’t like to have choice?—except this ignores the fact that many Ontarians don’t have any other options. Two thirds of Ontarians do not currently have a workplace pension plan, and personal savings are not enough to fill the gap.

The Canadian pension system was designed to stand on three pillars that are intended to provide reliable retirement security across the country. Pillar 1 is univer-

sal government benefits for seniors, also known as Old Age Security, or OAS; the Guaranteed Income Supplement, or GIS; and the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, or GAINS. Together, these three programs provide guaranteed income to all seniors to ensure at least a minimum standard of living. Pillar 2 is the Canada Pension Plan, or CPP, which provides a reliable benefit to all Canadian workers. Pillar 3 is employment pension plans and individual retirement savings. But the third pillar is failing us.

As the prevalence of workplace pension plans continues to decrease, a greater reliance on individual retirement savings is being used to fill the gap. The problem is, private options that are halved by fees are failing Ontarians too. These private plans were never intended to take over the role of the third pillar entirely. They are simply meant to supplement, and we want to make sure that this government understands that.

We appreciate some of the rhetoric that we have heard from the government about addressing retirement security in Ontario, but as usual, their actions don't quite reflect their words, so we have some concerns.

So far, we have seen two budgets and a bill on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and still we haven't seen half the details that the government has provided for the PRPPs. The government has made it a priority to pass their private options before we break for summer, but the public plan won't see the light of day until 2017.

But perhaps the government just has some free time on their legislative agenda right now since they've managed to squeeze public hearings on their budget, which includes the privatization of one of Ontario's largest public assets, into four days of hearings in Toronto. I guess getting PRPPs out the door is a bigger priority for the government than open dialogue and public consultation. So, Mr. Speaker, we have some concerns.

The bill we are debating today at third reading is substantively the same bill we debated a few months ago at second reading, so we will attempt to address a number of the issues that the government continues to ignore and we will continue to try and point their priorities on a more progressive path. Ontario is experiencing a retirement security crisis and we are here to remind the government that they need to put all their energy into plans that solely benefit pensioners if they want to find a real solution.

So far I have spoken a little about our concerns regarding the government's pension priorities, but I would like to elaborate a bit on the historical context. After years of steady prodding by labour and seniors' groups and seven federal-provincial finance ministers' meetings, the Harper government was forced to admit that Canadians were not saving enough for their retirement, and those without workplace pensions—two thirds of working Canadians—needed a safe, affordable and reliable retirement savings vehicle.

At their December 2012 meeting, federal and provincial finance ministers agreed to consider a "modest" CPP enhancement to complement the private sector PRPPs they had already endorsed at a previous meeting.

In 2012 the federal government passed PRPP legislation based on the model put forward by the life insurance industry. By 2013, however, the federal government had made it clear that it would not be proceeding with any sort of enhancement to the CPP. Not surprisingly, PRPPs became the Harper government's version of a solution to the retirement security crisis altogether.

However, because 85% of workers are provincially regulated and the fact that most federally regulated workers already have workplace pensions, those who would benefit from the sale of PRPPs began lobbying for Ontario provincial PRPP legislation to copy the federal legislation. For years the position of the Ontario Liberal government was that they would not proceed with provincial PRPP legislation, in favour of enhancing the CPP. But, as we can see, something has changed along the way and the government has shifted its priorities, whether they want us to know it or not.

Toward the end of the fall session, the government introduced two pieces of legislation related to retirement savings. In fact, Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, they even released them on the same day.

First, Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, is the first of three pieces of legislation that will eventually comprise the ORPP. This bill is little more than a framework, mostly reiterating information that was already established during last year's budget, and provides little new or substantive policy.

Second, Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, is a fully fleshed-out piece of legislation that will allow PRPPs to hit the ground running once the bill receives royal assent. It's so clear; it's almost too transparent.

This government has gotten a lot of mileage from their claims of being progressive, but the only thing they did to put the ORPP ahead of the PRPP was list it one position higher on the order paper. As I said before, I can only imagine the strategic discussion that went on in the caucus room about making sure that the ORPP was Bill 56 instead of Bill 57.

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If this government were truly so committed to public pensions, then that is where they would have focused their energy. PRPPs would have been an afterthought instead of the secret prize in this government's pension shell game. We've seen it far too often: The government tries to hide its true intentions on both sides, and the policy suffers as a result. In order to appease their friends on the right, the government knew they had to give PRPPs a head start on the ORPP, but to avoid compromising their progressive image, they made sure to pass something ORPP-related on the same day marginally first. Fortunately, in our parliamentary system, our job on this side of the aisle is to hold the government to account, and we're doing our best to do just that.

I would also like to elaborate on our concerns regarding PRPPs. As I noted earlier, the government loves to tout their voluntary options, but when there aren't other options available to Ontarians, we start to wonder, how voluntary is it?

The single biggest problem with private sector retirement savings plans, such as the PRPPs, are the private sector management fees. Canadians pay 2% or more for administration of their RRSPs, whereas the large public pension funds, such as CPP and OMERS, pay well less than 1% for fund administration. High fees erode returns. PRPPs are supposed to be very large funds designed to keep fees low, but the legislation leaves the setting of acceptable fees to regulation.

The CPP Investment Board, like the large provincial public sector workplace pension plans, has managed to keep administration costs very low. This makes them a better sponsor than the insurance industry and banks for a retirement savings vehicle.

As I stated earlier, across a lifetime, the difference is immense, and we don't want to see Ontarians losing half of their retirement savings to bank and insurance fees.

While I've got some time, I would like to address one issue that we have discussed on countless occasions at least one more time while we're here today, and that is the issue of comparability. The first concern that we had about PRPPs was whether they would be considered comparable and subsequently exempt from the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I asked the question more than a few times during question period, but both the Minister of Finance and the associate minister responsible for the ORPP were not willing to give a concrete on-the-record answer. After the third try, I submitted my question on the order paper and anxiously awaited the government's response.

To my colleagues with a little more experience than I have, this was a learning experience for me. I learned that the government has a fairly lengthy period of time to respond to order paper questions, and, more importantly, I learned that the government makes use of that time in its entirety.

After submitting my question in November, I finally received my answer in late February, two days before their answer was due. With that much time to prepare, I expected that the answer that I received would be definitive and comprehensive.

Mr. Bill Walker: It wasn't?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It wasn't. But that's jumping ahead. I'd like to read that answer to you here today, and I'll let you all judge whether you feel that those adjectives accurately reflect the response that I received.

I'll start with my question: "Enquiry of the ministry: Will the Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan clarify whether PRPPs will be considered comparable and will employees of employers enrolled in PRPPs be exempted from the automatic enrollment provisions of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan?" Pretty straightforward, I thought.

Their response, which I would like to read into the record: "On December 17, 2014, the government released a discussion paper that set out its preferred approach on key design features of the ORPP, including the definition of a comparable plan.

"As stated in the discussion paper, the preferred approach is to define comparable plans as defined benefit

(DB) and target benefit (TB) multi-employer pension plans (MEPPs) as these plans closely align with the key features of the ORPP and the CPP.

"The government recognizes that voluntary savings mechanisms, like PRPPs, will also play an important role in strengthening the retirement income system. As the minister has previously stated, our current view"—I'll say that again—"our current view is that these vehicles are complementary and will not be considered comparable.

"The government is currently reviewing submissions from the consultation process. Final decisions on this and other key design features will be outlined in the future."

Just to revisit: As it says in the letter—"currently." As you can see, the government, as usual, has been rather careful with their language. In more ways than I can count, they leave their position open-ended and down-right malleable. That is not to say that we expect the government to have all of the details of the ORPP set and ready at this moment. This is not a logistical question; it is a question of intentions; it is a question of priorities; it is a question of whether the government is more concerned with making the plan as strong as possible or giving themselves some wiggle room on the right.

If this government wanted to give pension security a real chance, they would have waited to introduce new private plans. I guess it comes down to priorities.

We will continue to hold the government to account so that these sorts of concessions are not made and Ontarians receive the most progressive plan possible going forward.

Mr. Speaker, as we've noted before, we also question the validity of the government's claim that PRPPs close a gap in the existing pension framework. Over the past six months, the government has spoken at length about the importance of voluntary options, but this does not take into account the fact that a multitude of voluntary options already exist. Whether it be RRSPs, TFSAs, ETFs or any other financial acronym you can think of, PRPPs are not so much filling an existing gap as piling into an already crowded space.

To illustrate this point, I would like to return to an interesting article I came across a few months ago on this topic. The article is by Greg Hurst, a Vancouver-based pension consultant with Greg Hurst and Associates Ltd., and it is titled, "Does Anyone Need a PRPP?"

"The early bloom on the PRPP rosebush was that employers could provide a retirement program while at the same time avoiding fiduciary responsibility. This bloom soon withered as most commentators observed that employers would still have responsibility for selecting and monitoring a PRPP provider (which activities may have fiduciary characteristics), and this doesn't seem much different from existing responsibilities relating to group RRSPs or DC plans."

The article finishes by summarizing this point quite well: "As long as DC pension plans, deferred profit-sharing plans and RRSPs are available and there is no mandatory requirement for an employer to implement a

pension plan, nobody needs a PRPP. I suspect nobody will want them either.”

There is little to support the government’s claim that PRPPs will fill a gap in the retirement security system, and we are left to question their true motives for bringing this bill forward. We agree that Ontario has a retirement savings crisis, but the answer is not yet another private sector savings vehicle. To illustrate this point, Mr. Speaker, allow me to share some of the numbers on RRSPs in Canada: \$683.6 billion—that number is the total unused RRSP contribution room as of 2011; 24%—that’s the percentage of eligible tax filers who contributed to an RRSP in 2011; 22.7 million—that is the number of Canadians with RRSP contribution room in 2011. So as you can see, the RRSP system is not stretched in our country.

In 2012, in my riding of Oshawa, 95% of those aged 65 or older received income from CPP but only 9.4% received income from an RRSP.

Canadians now contribute about \$40 billion annually to their RRSPs, but that still leaves an estimated \$80 billion in RRSP tax deferral room that has not been taken up.

RRSPs play an important role in our retirement savings, but the vast majority of Canadians continue to have ample room available for additional savings, yet the government continues to tell us that PRPPs are a needed addition. Mr. Speaker, we beg to differ.

In conclusion, our opposition to Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, comes down to insincerity and misplaced priorities by the government. When the government speaks about pensions, they speak about public plans that benefit pensioners, but when it comes to legislation, they put private options first.

As I stated earlier, there is nothing wrong with voluntary savings options, but there is something wrong with the way this government has been trying to sell them. The fact is that we are all here for one reason, and that is to serve the people of Ontario. But Bill 57 will sell them a watered-down retirement.

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Two thirds of Ontarians currently do not have a workplace pension, and that gap cannot be filled by private options that will see half of their retirement savings eroded by fees. There are no employer obligations to contribute to PRPPs. Workers are pretty much on their own in terms of contributions. There is no defined or even target benefit with PRPPs. Workers end up with whatever the market returns are on their cumulative contributions when they retire. So I guess they just need to cross their fingers.

There are questions, too: Will the banks and insurance firms who administer PRPPs be permitted to invest the funds in all those investment products that they sell themselves? It’s a pretty big question.

The NDP supports the idea of public pensions. That’s why we proposed one for Ontario in 2010. The NDP supports progressive public programs. We don’t, however, and never will support Harper-style pooled retirement pension plans.

Speaker, I’ve said it before: Banks and insurance companies are not planning to retire any time soon. But workers are retiring every day, and we want to ensure that when they do retire, they are able to do so with dignity.

If our job as members of provincial Parliament is to represent the interests of Ontarians, then the government is not doing its job with this bill, and that is why I can’t support it. As always, it has been my honour to rise in this Legislature and speak on behalf of my constituents as the member of provincial Parliament for Oshawa, and on behalf of all Ontarians as the NDP’s critic for pensions. As New Democrats, we have always and will always believe that all Ontarians should have access to a strong defined-benefit pension plan. And for those who don’t have one, it is our duty as representatives of this province to provide it.

Ontarians are facing real challenges. Precarious employment, a rising cost of living and a declining median income all contribute to the growing instability that has become the norm for too many families. And it has made it nearly impossible to adequately save for retirement. We ask that the government take this opportunity to focus their energy on these people, on these families, on them, to act on their behalf and to prioritize a solution that puts pensioners first. We implore this government to design and implement a progressive public pension plan for hard-working people across Ontario who deserve one. Stop focusing on exceptions and exemptions, and start focusing on helping more Ontarians.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I’m pleased to speak to third reading of Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. First and foremost I want to say that I’m pleased to be supporting this. Unlike the ORPP that the government introduced, the PRPP is voluntary and it’s low-cost, two of the key tenets that people in my riding have asked to make sure of when we’re thinking of a pension plan.

PRPPs are similar to a defined contribution plan, and employer contributions are not mandatory—again, a key feature, Mr. Speaker. They would be offered to anyone working in Ontario, including the self-employed. I hear this from a lot of people, certainly in your riding and my riding. A lot of self-employed people think this is a good way to go. It’s something they want to have in front of them, and certainly prefer it much more than they do the ORPP introduced by the government. It’s available to all of those who are not covered by the current federal PRPP.

I want to extend a commendation to our pension critic and MPP for York–Simcoe, Julia Munro, who championed the PRPP in our Paths to Prosperity white papers. For almost three years, she, on behalf of our PC Party, had been advocating for such a pension plan. She also introduced Bill 50, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, in 2013. It was referred to committee after second

reading; however, it died on the order paper. So again, accolades to her for continuing to bring this forward on behalf of the people of Ontario first and foremost, but also on behalf of our PC caucus. As such, our party has been on the forefront in promoting and advocating for people to have options for retirement savings such as those offered with these pooled retirement pension plans.

As we learned back in 2013 through our party's research and consultations, only about 40% of Canadians are members of a workplace pension plan and only 30% are saving on their own through RRSPs. So a vehicle like this certainly provides an opportunity for people to have that flexibility without it being mandatory.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that almost 80% of small businesses in Canada don't offer company pension plans. That is why the PRPP is a pension plan that many people want, particularly middle-income Ontarians who do not have sufficient savings and investments to guarantee a decent income and quality of life for their retirement. It's no surprise that pooled registered pension plans are supported by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Certificated General Accountants of Ontario, Sun Life Financial and the Association of Canadian Pension Management, to name a few.

My colleagues and I support the move to give Ontarians the right to choose how they save for retirement. That's one of the key tenets of this. It gives the individual person, and also gives an individual company and the owners of that company, the right to choose how they wish to save for their retirement. It's not something that's being dictated by a government that doesn't necessarily understand the needs, the wants or the wishes, or most importantly the ability, of people to pay into such a plan.

For clarification, I want to talk a little bit about the Liberals' ORPP, which I referenced earlier. It is in stark contrast to the PRPP. The ORPP, which has been given royal assent, is not necessarily supported by a large consensus of the business community, or by workers I have talked to. The one thing I want to reiterate here, for the people listening and those at home who will read this later in Hansard, is that with the ORPP no one is going to receive any funds for 40 years. It's being very liberal that the Liberals can actually manage a fund of this magnitude. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, that is a real stretch.

This whole ORPP, in our opinion, was not thought out well. There are many questions remaining. How much is it going to cost? I don't just mean financial cost to the individual or the company. What's the cost to our province long-term? How many jobs is this going to take out of our economy, and what is the spin-off effect to our whole society? Who is compelled to participate? They can't answer those types of things. Who is going to be exempt? Those are the questions I receive every day in my riding from people in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. They are saying to me, "Bill, how can the government roll out a plan—actually steamroll it through the Legislature through legislation—and they can't even answer two simple questions: Who is compelled, and who is exempt?"

What is the impact on the employer? I don't think this was given much thought. Most of the employers in my riding who have talked to me said, "We had no insight into this. We had no ability to have impact on this." What is the impact for a small mom-and-pop shop or a middle-sized business? What is the overall impact going to be to them? Some have said to me that they have been giving their employees RRSP contributions in the range of 4% to 6%. They're not certain whether they're going to be able to continue that if this 1.9% is going to be rolled in on top of that.

In fact, that employee may actually receive less in future, because that company—higher energy rates and the cost of the red tape that is being imposed on them by this government are just continually eating away at the disposable income they have. So they're saying it might end up that an employer who right now is dedicating 4% to 6% to an RRSP is going to get the 1.9% that's mandated—they don't even have a choice in this. That's a huge outcome.

The other is the impact on jobs. We've heard from a number of credible agencies, in regard to the ORPP, that there are going to be thousands and thousands of jobs lost if this thing actually sees the light of day, and it seems that the government is intent on rolling it through. Frankly, after a series of spending scandals under this Liberal government, everyone fears, doubts and questions whether the Liberals have the ability to manage their hard-earned wages.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, on a personal side, I don't believe that anyone trusts this Liberal government with any financial acumen.

Mr. Michael Harris: I don't.

Mr. Bill Walker: Certainly Michael Harris from Kitchener-Conestoga doesn't—the billions they have wasted and the record debt and deficit they have created under their 12-year reign of terror.

As I said, the single biggest difference between the two pension bills is that the ORPP is mandatory income contributions from millions of Ontario workers and employers: 1.9% from the employer and 1.9% from the employee. That's on top of the existing CPP: 4.95% from the employer, and another 4.95% from the employee, and EI deductions. And it replicates the current Canada Pension Plan.

As I've said on behalf of small business, when you factor in the rising cost of energy—it has quadrupled under this government, and they're saying it's going to double and triple again in the next four years; and nothing in sight says that's going to slow down—the red tape and all the money wasted that could be going into small business, they're really starting to see the consequences of the actions over the last 12 years. They're very, very concerned.

I want to turn back to the PRPP. What I like about it, and as has been stated by the member from Simcoe, is that it's voluntary, it's portable and it does not threaten to kill jobs, reduce business investment and destabilize our financial sector or household finances. One thing Ms.

Munro said, and that I believe strongly, is that it actually allows people to be responsible for their own actions, for their own retirement. Again, that's what the folks in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound are saying

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“I run a business. I've raised a family. I've done very well for myself. Why can't the government just get out of the way and let me manage for my own purposes? Why can it not be something that we can buy into on a voluntary basis? Why are they coming and tying me with the ORPP? 'You shall do this and you shall listen to us,' despite the incredibly poor track record over their 12 years of record debt, record deficit, which is only going one way, and that continues to be higher and higher spiralling debt costs to our economy.”

I want to just reiterate that it's certainly a type of pension plan that is similar to a defined contribution plan. They're completely voluntary. Employer contributions are not mandatory and, therefore, PRPPs are supported by business owners. If I was the government on the other side that had a majority, I would have been rolling this out. I would have said that this is my first priority, because you would have had a lot better buy-in from the public, and certainly from small and medium-sized businesses.

We believe fundamentally that Ontarians have a right to choose how they save for their retirement. PRPPs would be offered to anyone working in Ontario and, as I mentioned earlier, specifically the self-employed. Those are the folks out there who take all the risks. They go out every day, based on their abilities, their belief in our great province and their own self-directed abilities to go out and take risks. They want to go out and be entrepreneurs and drive our economy, which is really how it happens. They're not expecting a safety net. They're not getting up every morning thinking, “Someone else has to take care of me.” They're saying, “I'm prepared to do that.” All they want is a vehicle, like this PRPP, which is voluntary and flexible to meet the needs that they wish to choose.

As I mentioned earlier, they're portable between jobs and employers, making it easy to continue contributing at a new job, and it's a convenient pension plan.

In 2012, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce submitted a letter to the Finance Minister Dwight Duncan calling on the government to introduce legislation to implement PRPPs: “We hope you believe, as we do, that PRPPs will help strengthen the retirement income system in Ontario.”

Again in 2012, the CFIB submitted a letter to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan urging him “to move quickly to implement pooled registered pension plans in your province. We further ask you to avoid increasing Canada Pension Plan premiums at this time....”

PRPPs “address some of the problems with current pension tools by promoting lower fees and by shifting the administrative burden from employers to financial institutions. In addition to lower fees, employee plans will also benefit from the fact that, unlike contributions to

employee RRSP plans, employer contributions PRPPs will not attract additional payroll taxes like EI, CPP and WSIB premiums.”

The PRPP, as I've mentioned a number of times, is voluntary. We support it, Mr. Speaker, and certainly hope that the government will make sure that it is enacted in a timely manner for the benefit of all Ontarians.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will try to add a few minutes of my voice to this debate, third reading of pooled registered pension plans. Really, there's a pension plan only in the title. We're not really talking about pension plans. We are talking about an investment instrument, but an investment instrument that will have a power that no other investments have. They will the power to take money off your cheque, whether you want to or not. How will that work? Quite simply: Your employer will decide that they will be part of this with Manulife, any bank or insurance company; you name it. The employer doesn't have to put a single cent—zero—into the pension plan, but once they've signed up, you as the worker are on the hook to pay.

I can just see this already. The employers are off the hook. They don't have to pay a cent into this. The different banks and insurance companies will be fighting one another to get the businesses. Think: probably bonuses to those employers. So not only does your employer not have to pay, there's a good chance he's going to have some kind of a kickback or return or bonus for having signed up with this insurance company rather than that one, and you will be on the hook for paying. But you won't have a pension plan; you will have an investment. How much will you be getting once you retire? Nobody will ever be able to tell you till the day it actually happens.

How do you plan for a part of your life that is so critical, the part of your life where you go from being employed and receiving a paycheque every week, two weeks, every month, going into a part of your life where you may not be able to work anymore, not knowing how much money you will live on?

I come from Sudbury. I represent the riding of Nickel Belt. We are very, very privileged that most of the retired people in my riding are retired from the two big mines. They used to be called Inco and Falconbridge. They have changed names three or four times. They're now called Vale and Sudbury Integrated Nickel Operations. But the pensioners knew—they knew the first day at work, the last day at work—exactly how much money they were going to have.

My father-in-law was retired for over 37 years. But because they knew how much money they had coming in every month, they budgeted. They budgeted so that they would make the money last. They knew exactly how much was coming in. They knew what they could and could not afford. They knew how much debt they could—and she is 92 years old; my father-in-law passed away, but she has a survivor's pension, my mother-in-

law. She lived through the Depression. She knows how to budget. They made sure that they made their money last. But they knew this all along. They knew when he retired and they knew five years before he retired how much money they would have. So they knew that they were not able to buy this car or move the house or do this, but they also knew what they were able to do. This is what a defined benefit pension plan allows you to do: It allows you to plan your life in a way that is fiscally responsible.

None of this is what we're talking about today. What we're talking about today is that you have the choice to make investments. We all have the choice to make investments right now. You can go to any bank, *caisse populaire*—you name it—and they will be quite happy to sell you an instrument, an investment that you can collect once you retire. That's all that does. It allows you to invest in something that you will use once you are retired, except that the government puts its finger into it, which means that it takes away your choice. It means that whether you want to or not, whether you have a better investment with your own investment counsellor or whether you are in a position to do something different, you won't have a choice. The government is giving those insurance companies, those banks, the right to come and take money right off your cheque. All they have to do is get the sign-off from your employer, and this is it. The employer is off the hook, doesn't have to match, doesn't have to give you a single cent, but you have to participate in this.

And if you find that the return on investment is really crummy and that you're able to do way better elsewhere, sorry; you can't get out of there. Your employer has signed that you have to continue to invest in this, not knowing what you're going to get at the end. And even if you do know what you're getting, even if you're able to do better, you're not going to be allowed to do that. It gives no security at the end so that you can budget what your retirement income is going to look like, what your life in retirement is going to look like. You will know this the day that you're retired and you sit down and they do the calculation—not a good way forward, Speaker.

A good way forward is to have a good defined benefit pension plan like so many people in my riding have. Their pensions are not big, but they knew how much it was going to be. It's steady. Every month it comes. It increases a tiny wee bit just about once a year. I have over 23,000 people in my riding who, every month, get that cheque. They balance with it. It changes everything to have a steady stream of income through retirement. It changes people's lives for the better. They are able to live their retirement years in dignity and they are able to make plans that make sense because they know how much will come. With those financial instruments, none of that is there. If the markets tank, so does your retirement income. If you happen to retire at a bad time—you may have thought you would have \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month coming in, and it's down to \$500 or \$700 a month. You have no way of knowing what will be coming to you. This is not a good plan.

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It is insulting to call this a pension plan, because it is not a pension plan; it's an investment instrument that your employer will force you to put money into and over which you will have no control whatsoever. You won't control how much you'll put in. You won't control what kind of risk you want. You won't control how much you will get back. You won't control any of that. All you can control is whether you want to continue working for that employer or not. That's not a choice, Speaker. Nobody has those kinds of choices. Once you have a job, you hold onto it the best you can. This is a real insult to the two thirds of workers in Ontario who do not have a pension plan and who want and need a pension plan.

If you want to see what defined benefit pension plans look like, come into my community. Come into the retirement homes that we have. Come and see the difference it makes when seniors don't live in poverty. It changes everything. It shows a community that has dignity, that has respect. This is not going to do any of that. It is a real shame that this is what this government is bringing forward. We need better than this. I expect better than that for the people of Ontario. To me, this is a real letdown. I could never vote for something like this.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise in this Legislature to add to some of the comments that have already been made by my colleagues the member for Oshawa and the member for Nickel Belt, expressing some of the concerns that we have on this side of the House with this legislation, Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act. As has already been pointed out, to include the word "pension" in the title of this act is disingenuous at best. This is not a pension. This is not a solution to the retirement crisis that is facing people in Ontario and across Canada.

I have previously shared with MPPs in this House some of the statistics that are coming out of my community of London. The most recent report, the Vital Signs report from the London Community Foundation, found that we have experienced a 300% increase in the poverty rate among seniors in London between 2010 and 2011. We are seeing dramatic increases in poverty across this province among seniors. We heard in December 2014, in the Hunger Report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks, that seniors and university students are two of the fastest-growing groups of food bank users in this province. So we know that more and more seniors are unable to retire in dignity and are forced to live in poverty once they finish working.

Also in my community, we are looking at a poverty rate that is almost 32% higher than the national average, so poverty is very real to the constituents that I represent in London West. In particular, it is very real to seniors.

As the women's issues critic for the NDP caucus, I want to speak a little bit about the impact of poverty and the lack of real retirement security programs on women. Seniors in this province are predominantly female. We know that women live longer than men. When you go

into any nursing home, any retirement home, you will see that a much greater proportion of residents are women, in particular among the oldest age groups. We also know that for senior women who are single, who are living alone, they are twice as likely, compared to senior men, to be living in poverty. They are much more reliant on income security programs like OAS, GIS and GAINS, much less likely to have a pension income from their time in the workforce, and very likely—almost a third of elderly women in this province who are on their own live below the poverty line.

Just last week, we heard another report from the United Way showing that about 52% of workers—the majority, in fact—in the GTA and Hamilton area are now working in precarious jobs. People who are working in precarious jobs, who are working in part-time, contract or temporary positions, cannot afford to put money aside for retirement. This Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, comparable to an RRSP or other kinds of private financial products that people can purchase to support them in retirement, is not the solution to ensure that seniors can live their final years in dignity.

New Democrats are very concerned about a plan that does not provide a defined benefit, that has no employer contribution whatsoever and that is voluntary for participation. As has been said by others of my colleagues, this is not the way to provide a life of dignity for our seniors in this province, and New Democrats will continue to oppose this legislation as we reach the end of this third reading debate.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this place, but not really an honour to speak to this bill. But it is an honour to speak on behalf of the NDP caucus on Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act.

The first thing that's wrong with this bill is the fact that it's called a pension plan, because it's not a pension plan. If you will remember back to the last election, one of the promises in the Liberal campaign was an Ontario pension plan, because the CPP wasn't working—it was working, but it wasn't big enough, and they were sick of waiting for the feds, which we are as well, and they were going to institute it themselves.

So they've put one like that and then they've put one like this, which isn't a pension plan; it's basically an RRSP. Really, the goal of this plan, I think, is to confuse people, because they think that this is a pension plan, and it's not a pension plan. When people think of a pension plan, they think, "Okay, we're going to get so much a month." That's a defined benefit pension plan. That's what people think of when you say "pension plan." When you think of an RRSP, nobody thinks that there's going to be a guarantee of so much money; it depends on how much money you put in. But when you say "pension plan," that's what you have in the back of your mind.

When people read this, and, "The government is moving on the pension plan," in fact, they're not. They're not. The idea that this is going to create more pension benefits isn't accurate either, because even if you look at

RRSPs, right now Canadians contribute \$40 billion annually to RRSPs, but there's \$80 billion left in RRSP contribution room. So it's not that this bill is going to make retirement any easier for anyone. What this bill basically does is it pools the plans. So you can use this as a vehicle, for those who have the money to put it in, and depending on what the market does is what you will have at the end. Doesn't that sound amazingly like an RRSP? That's basically, folks at home, what this is. It's not, as the member from London West said, really a pension plan, and as the member from Nickel Belt stated very well. In Nickel Belt, they know the difference between an actual defined benefit pension plan and a savings plan. She did a very good job of explaining that people who have been fortunate enough to work in sectors that have defined benefit pension plans actually have a cushion in their retirement that they can depend on, so they can actually live in dignity. This does not guarantee that in any way, shape or form.

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So there are definitely differences of opinion on whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. We don't think it does the job. The Liberals seem to think so; the Conservatives are in favour. More power to them. If they actually were up front with what this is—it's a group RRSP, basically. That's what this legislation is: a group RRSP. If they called it that and didn't have it masquerading as a pension plan, it might be worth debating further.

This is not a pension plan, and that is why, Speaker, we will remain opposed to it.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 16, 2015, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Sousa has moved third reading of Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice from the chief government whip asking that the vote on this matter be deferred until tomorrow during the time of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT
(AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE
ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE
AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996
SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Mr. Leal moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I assume the minister would want to lead off the debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on third reading of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Beaches–East York, Mr. Arthur Potts.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That agricultural mecca.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I thank my good friend from Barry's Bay for the intervention on that.

I want to thank Mr. Potts for shepherding this important bill through committee. I'd also like to acknowledge the contributions from the agriculture critic for the official opposition, the honourable gentleman from Haldimand–Norfolk, and the agriculture critic from the third party, the honourable gentleman from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

We had two excellent days of committee hearings. I want to thank all committee members and the presenters who took time to appear before the committee as part of the review process. This was a productive conversation during those hearings, and I want to thank everyone for their detailed participation.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's farmers grow and harvest a diverse range of crops and livestock. When unforeseen challenges such as pests, weather and disease strike, production insurance is there to provide coverage for losses and, indeed, yield reductions. In Ontario, production insurance is currently available for nearly 90 crops and perennial plants, but Ontario farmers grow and raise more than 200 commodities. This leaves some farmers' products ineligible for this very valuable and important coverage.

Production insurance is important because it protects our farmers and our valuable agricultural sector, a sector that I'm proud to say contributes more than \$34.8 billion to the GDP of the province of Ontario. It's a growing sector and a sector that we want to support, because we grow benefits for our entire province.

In 2013, when she was also Minister of Agriculture and Food, Premier Wynne issued the agri-food growth challenge. It calls on our sector to double our annual rate of growth and create 120,000 new jobs by 2020. This challenge recognizes the significant growth opportunities that this sector has to offer. It's an ambitious target, but I have every confidence in our ability to meet it together. As Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I'm fully committed to growing Ontario's agri-food sector and meeting the Premier's challenge.

The agricultural sector is a cornerstone of employment and economic growth for our great province. Expanding production insurance in Ontario would help us create a business environment that encourages this important growth. When farmers know that they are financially

protected, they have the confidence to reinvest in their businesses. Expanding production insurance in Ontario will help our farmers compete.

Currently, Ontario is the only province in Canada without the authority to offer production insurance plans for a full range of agricultural products and producers, which means farmers in the rest of Canada have an advantage over ours at this particular time. If we want to encourage growth in this sector and make our agri-food processors stronger, we need to give them the necessary tools.

To create future opportunities for growth, farmers need business supports that allow them to compete in national and international markets. Farmers and agri-food innovators are evolving with the industry, and government policy must evolve in order to help them succeed.

Mr. Speaker, expanding our production insurance program will also help us responsibly manage the province's finances. When producers suffer losses and don't have production insurance coverage, it puts pressure on the province to respond with direct or ad hoc programming. We've seen ad hoc programs cost Ontario millions of dollars in a single year, as those programs are funded solely by the provincial government. It takes time to set up ad hoc programs, meaning farmers have to wait to get access to much-needed funds.

Production insurance is much more predictable than ad hoc programs. Premiums for production insurance are shared between the producers, the provincial government and the federal government. All stakeholders involved have an interest in seeing well-developed, properly administered production insurance plans.

If passed, Bill 40 would allow for improved financial responsibility, with no immediate cost to the provincial government. In a time of increasing fiscal prudence, production insurance, as we would say in Peterborough county, just makes good sense.

As I've said, premiums for crop insurance are shared by the government of Canada, the province of Ontario and, indeed, the producers themselves. If the bill is passed, the production insurance plans we develop would be created through appropriate and thorough consultation. Our plans must reflect and meet the needs of the farmers they're intended to protect. Should the bill pass, specifics of future plans will be discussed when there's demand from the industry to initiate conversations.

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The proposed amendment was debated in this House for more than 11 hours, and of all 79 members who spoke on the bill, covering both sides of the House, no one spoke against it. That means we have a consensus that's being developed right here in this House. Many members on both sides made the point that this is a change past due. It's time to level the playing field for our great farmers in the province of Ontario.

As my colleague, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Mr. Vanthof, said after first reading of the bill, expanded production insurance “will mean the difference between paying the bills and losing the farm” for many of our very important producers.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, expanded production insurance would create the opportunity to develop plans for farmers who produce agricultural products other than crops and perennial plants. It will give farmers access to the protection they need to safeguard their very important investments.

The proposed legislation would not only help producers manage risks; it would also free up producers' resources, encouraging greater innovation, profitability and job creation in the agri-food sector.

Expanded production insurance will help more farmers deal with losses from natural events, encourage growth in Ontario's agri-food sector and allow our farmers to compete fairly with farmers in other provinces and indeed on an international basis.

Ontario's agricultural sector: 52,000 farms producing over 200 commodities and supporting 780,000 jobs each and every day. This is a very important sector of Ontario's economy. A sector of this value is worth protecting through this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll turn it over to my parliamentary assistant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you, Minister Leal. Thank you for the great work you do in your riding of Peterborough and representing rural Ontario in your capacity as the minister on that portfolio and bringing this very important piece of legislation, which we know farmers across Ontario—agricultural specialists—have been asking for for years. So thank you for introducing it and bringing it to this stage.

I do, of course, represent the great riding of Beaches–East York, which has a fantastic agricultural history. Just recently, my partner and I bought a wonderful house, which was one of the original farmhouses in Beaches–East York at a time when there was acreage of land around us. I'm very much looking forward to moving into that space and continuing somewhat of an agriculture tradition in the Beaches.

I'm pleased today to speak to this third reading of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. It was a pleasure for me to take the bill through committee. We had good conversations about how we can use this tool to strengthen our agricultural industry. I, too, would like to thank all of the colleagues and our stakeholders who took part in the committee hearings.

We had two excellent days of hearings for Bill 40: one day in Toronto and the other in Guelph. Guelph, of course, is a central location for so many of our commodity groups and our stakeholders, so we knew it was important to bring the hearings to them there. At those hearings, we talked about what expanded production insurance will mean for farmers and how it will help our valuable agricultural sector.

Production insurance is an exceptionally important tool for local Ontario farmers. It's a risk management tool that all farmers need but that not that all farmers can access. Expanding production insurance in Ontario would be a huge benefit to all of the farmers in our province.

As Minister Leal has said, the predictability of expanded production insurance would allow our province to budget for our portion of the premiums and to provide quick access to funds when our farmers need them. Instead of an unanticipated ad hoc program that's costing the province millions of dollars, we can provide appropriate coverage through production insurance in a predictable way and share the cost between the farmers, the provincial government and the federal government.

I think it's important to note that production insurance encourages good management practices. Lorne Small from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario spoke at our committee hearing in Guelph, and he made this point very, very well. You do not want to jeopardize your ability to make a claim when you need to. It's like having house insurance. You don't leave an unattended pot on a stove and risk a house fire just because you know that insurance will cover your losses.

Scott Persall of the Grain Farmers of Ontario also spoke at committee hearings. He made the point that expanded production insurance gives farmers confidence to reinvest in their farms. This is an extremely important concept to remember. Expanding production insurance helps farmers reinvest in their families and their futures. It helps them look at new ways of growing their businesses and creating more jobs in the agri-food sector. Production insurance isn't just good for our farmers; it's good for our economy, too.

We also heard from Amy Cronin of Ontario Pork, who, in responding to a direct question from me during the committee hearings in Guelph when I asked her if the bill is right the way it is now or if we need amendments, was absolutely crystal clear that the bill in its current form meets all the objectives we need of it and she was very, very supportive.

Our goal with this proposed amendment to the Crop Insurance Act is to make the legislation as all-encompassing as possible. We want it to work for our farmers. Putting emphasis on one commodity or one type of peril over another simply limits the scope of crop insurance. We want now to ensure that the legislation will allow all our farmers to play on a level playing field.

When production insurance was first introduced in 1960, we had less than 10 plans in operation. Today it's just shy of 90. Now is the time for us to expand the number of plans and offer much-needed protection that our producers are asking for. We've heard from our colleagues on the other side of the House and from producers that an expansion of production insurance is long overdue. So let's rectify that situation.

Developing production insurance in Ontario has been an evolutionary process, the concept having been in place since the 1960s, and in that time the plans available to our farmers have grown and changed. Expanding production insurance now is the next step in that evolution. There is a national framework for production insurance, but within that framework provinces have the flexibility to create plans that meet the needs of the farmers on a commodity-by-commodity basis in the provinces they represent.

Production insurance is based on four key principles.

The first principle is shared program costs and participation by both the federal government and provincial governments as well as the producers. The premiums are shared on a 36%-40%-24% basis by the federal government, the farmers and the provincial government respectively. No one stakeholder decides how the plans are designed. It's a collaborative process.

The second principle is voluntary participation. Farmers choose whether or not to enrol; the plans are not mandatory. Producers choose the parameters of the plan that make the most sense to their individual business requirements, and just like you choose a deductible on your car insurance, they will pick a plan and make it work for them.

The third principle is administration by the provincial government and not the federal government. Decisions about the plans are made locally by the people who understand local market conditions and local challenges.

Finally, actuarial soundness, the most important principle: Plans are designed to provide coverage that farmers need when they need it.

If Bill 40 is passed, any plans we create would be based on those same key principles. Allowing more products to be covered by production insurance would also fulfil a commitment we made to Ontario farmers under the Growing Forward 2 agreement in 2013. Growing Forward 2, as you know, is a five-year policy framework for our national agricultural and agri-food sector. The program is a federal, provincial and territorial investment. It's the basis for government agricultural programs and services.

When Growing Forward 2 was established in 2013, the federal and provincial governments created a protocol that said we would work to introduce production insurance plans for livestock. We said that we would move towards addressing agricultural risks through insurance-based solutions, and passing this bill helped us make good on that promise. Today we're taking a step forward and making good on our commitment by continuing the evolution of production insurance in Ontario.

At our committee hearings we heard from the commodity groups, farming organizations and so many others who have an interest in seeing this bill enacted. Representatives from Ontario Pork, the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario and the Grain Farmers of Ontario all presented at the public hearings, and they offered us excellent input on how we could make potential future plans work if this bill is passed.

Our MPPs and our commodity groups all see the value in expanding production insurance. When the bill was debated in the House, as Minister Leal noted, not a single person spoke against it, but we heard lots of opinions and had good conversations at our hearings, and everyone who spoke about this bill, whether they were an MPP or a stakeholder, agreed this was an important and valuable amendment and everyone knew we should act now to pass this legislation. Passing the bill would be just the

first step. If the bill is enacted, then the detailed work will begin. Requests for plans to cover other commodities will be driven by the producers in each of the sectors needing insurance.

1550

As we heard at the hearings, our farmers want this bill passed now, and once it is passed, they want us to invest the time it takes to get the plans right. They know that we'll work with them to iron out the details, and they want to be involved in developing those plans. We welcome that input.

Our stakeholders were also very clear at the hearings: It's not as simple as just adding a new commodity to our existing insurance plans. We need to understand the different risks each commodity faces, and we need to ensure that our entire suite of business risk management programs works well together to provide stable and predictable protection.

Bill 40 is an important piece of enabling legislation that helps our government support our entire agricultural sector. If passed, it will encourage growth and innovation in the sector. It levels the playing field to allow our farmers to compete fairly in national and international markets, and it helps our government with longer-term fiscal responsibility. Our farmers support the bill, and our colleagues in the House support the bill. It's now time to move the bill forward so that we can start the important and intricate work of developing plans that meet the needs of farmers.

I look forward to all-party support of this bill and getting it passed as soon as is practical.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I think it's important, in this Legislative Assembly, that we are discussing issues of agriculture, food and rural affairs: issues that have certainly been discussed back to 1867, and really back to the late 1700s.

In modern society, we are so far removed from the production of food. There are a few of us here who do live on farms and deal with barns, tractors, growing crops and raising livestock. To me, the most important thing—first of all, it's very difficult to generate income from the land. It is very risky, hence the support of our party for this agricultural insurance/production insurance legislation.

Farmers—food producers—deal with so many variables. We often think of the weather, but it's not just the weather. I know that down in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk we had frost last weekend. I saw some corn at the three- or four-leaf stage, nice and green, and the next day it was done. It was dead. A friend of mine in Haldimand county grows gigantic pumpkins. He puts an awful lot of work into these pumpkins. They were wiped out this weekend as well. Ginseng is another crop down our way, newly added to crop insurance in recent years. Ginseng got very hard hit as well.

I just want to make a point that it's as relevant today to discuss these issues in the Legislature as it was in the late 1700s.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's indeed an honour to stand in the House today and talk about the bill on agricultural insurance.

I remember when it was first introduced. It was with great fanfare, and it had great support because all of these new areas in farming were going to be eligible for insurance. We said at the time, of course, that the devil is in the details.

We were looking forward to the budget presentation when it came. What was it called? I think that Building Ontario Up was the name of the budget. We looked for those details in there, and they're not there. Thank you for including a lot of other people in the agricultural industry being eligible, Minister, but you have to put money behind it.

I will say to the minister that I look forward to the opportunity to finally go back to my riding and say to the farming community and the abattoir in my riding, "You know what? There's money there. There's actually money there."

Hon. Jeff Leal: How about I come with you?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd gladly appreciate that, Minister. Any time you want. But there's no money at the moment, Speaker.

The bill should be supported, because at some point down the road we hope to be able to convince the minister to, yes, indeed, empty one of those pockets. There has to be some money put into the bill so that people in the farming community can actually say, "I have insurance," because if anybody needs it, it's the farming community, all of the producers of our crops and our produce. They need to rest with the assurance that it's there.

So, Minister, whatever we can do to help you go to cabinet and get some money on the table, because you badly need it. You have to improve the bill, but we'll work with you on this.

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

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise today on behalf of my riding of Cambridge, but I also represent North Dumfries township, which is a rural community. I live in the midst of a number of different farms, and my neighbours grow crops such as cattle, sheep, soybeans, corn and mixed farming—chickens nearby. So I really understand the risks that our farmers face each and every day, and I'm very proud to support Bill 40.

Our farmers are innovative. They create jobs. They're growing Ontario's agri-food sector. By giving more producers the opportunity to access production insurance, they will be able to better manage their risk. That's very important to growing our sector. My young son came home from school the other day. He knew this already, but they were told in school that farmers feed the cities. That was an old slogan that they used to use. But there are many of our children who don't understand that our food comes from the land. We need to be able to support our farmers to do that.

An expanded production insurance program could, if passed, provide similar financial assistance, but divide the cost between the federal government, provincial government and producers in a predictable and incremental way over a much longer period of time. Ontario also made a commitment to expand the production insurance beyond crops and perennial plants when the ministry signed the federal/provincial/territorial Growing Forward 2 agreement in 2013. I'm proud that this bill will help to deliver on that commitment.

Ontario's agricultural sector has huge potential for growth, and the Agriculture Insurance Act, if passed, will allow for the growth to happen. We need to support our farmers so they can continue to increase their profitability and the agri-food sector in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to stand and suggest that we will be supporting this.

Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, of course, is the beef capital of Ontario. In both Bruce and Grey, we're very proud of the roots of our agricultural industry, particularly the livestock industry.

I think farmers, every day, manage a very challenging business, a very risky business. This certainly is a great thing to help them manage that risk. I think one of the other elements might even be to encourage new farmers to get into it, knowing that they are going to go out and they're going to put all of their efforts on the line with Mother Nature still in control for the most part. To be able to know you have that ability to have insurance is certainly something that I think will help them—a huge impact to the community, the whole agricultural community, but certainly in our backyard.

The livestock industry is absolutely critical. Whether we're talking beef, whether we're talking goats, whether we're talking sheep or lambs, there are just huge opportunities. One of the things we had a couple of years ago was a lot of lambs and sheep killed as a result of predators. So, again, having that ability to know they can go into this business and things that they have no control over aren't going to take them out of business—having insurance, just like any other business, I think, is a huge step forward. It definitely provides a lot of economic spinoff to the province; it provides a lot of jobs. I applaud that we're going to actually expand to do this.

A little bit of a shout-out to the Beef Farmers of Ontario: They're going to have their annual barbecue here on the grounds of Queen's Park this Wednesday, I believe it is. That's always a crowd favourite, both for legislators, certainly, and all the staff and people in the building. It's always a great event. What better way to promote what's grown right here in Ontario and, again, in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound? It's a huge commodity, a huge opportunity to promote, right in our own backyard, some of the best beef that you're going to find across the country, across North America. I can't say enough how proud I am. I get out and serve at our local barbecues and in my own backyard.

So I welcome everyone who's available to be here next Wednesday, and thank you for moving this forward, Minister.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will reply.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to say thank you for the very charitable remarks this afternoon from my colleagues from Haldimand–Norfolk, Windsor–Tecumseh, Cambridge and, of course, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk was quite right. On May 14, we had a patchy frost right across the province of Ontario that hit a number of sectors. I was inspecting some corn just this past weekend in Peterborough county—and if you go and visit some of the municipalities that were hit by that patchy frost on May 14, you can see some of the yellowness of the sprouts that have just come out of the ground.

To my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: We have now seen a real firming up of beef prices across the province of Ontario. I always give credit where credit is due. The federal Minister of Agriculture, Gerry Ritz, the work that he has been doing on COOL, country-of-origin labelling, which has been a long-time irritant both for Canada and Mexico—it appears that a bill may be moving through the United States Congress to repeal COOL legislation, which has been a real barrier for Canadian cattle to move south of the border to go to American feedlots and American processing operations. So we'll be happy to see that resolved without retaliatory trade measures on behalf of Canada.

To the member from Windsor–Tecumseh: Of course, I've spent some time in the wonderful city of Windsor. I'm a graduate—my second degree is in business—of the University of Windsor. I always appreciated the great agricultural sector in Essex county and that area—the home of one of the most famous agriculture ministers in the history of Canada, the late Senator Eugene Whelan, the guy who put his mark and footprint larger than life across Canada and indeed on an international basis when he had the great honour of being Canada's agriculture minister for well over 12 years. He served longer, I think, than any other individual in that position, and certainly brought great credit to agriculture both in Ontario and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on for another hour, but you want me to sit down after two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Actually, the House rules compel me to ask you to sit down after two minutes. At the same time, I enjoyed your comments. Thank you very much.

Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It is important for us to continue this third reading debate and to ensure that discussions do continue in this Legislature with respect to agriculture and food issues. We are debating proposed legislation, known as Bill 40, on production insurance.

I will be sharing some of my time with the member for Leeds–Grenville, who will provide some insight on what has been happening in eastern Ontario and down Kemptville way, in that great part of the province of Ontario.

We know this Agriculture Insurance Act amends the 1996 Crop Insurance Act. Speaker, you will remember that legislation from 1996, and if you don't, the Hansard is available, which is always a valuable resource. It's a great resource for this Legislature. When people stand up and make presentations, everything is recorded, and it really provides a wonderful research tool.

I certainly remember that debate 19 years ago, and legislation that built, as was mentioned, on work going back to the 1960s. I know how risky it was farming in the 1950s and 1960s, when we didn't have these kinds of insurance programs. We did not have these kinds of risk management programs. We did not have supply management. I know that because our family had broilers. We milked cows. I had a hatching egg flock. I'm just in the process of tearing that barn down—it's one of the values of the constituency week and the availability of Amish people who know how to dismantle these gigantic 40-foot-by-70-foot barns. There are still a few of them left around in our neck of the woods.

When this legislation, this approach, was first announced in the Legislature, I raised a number of questions, one question specifically. This can be worked out down the road. Oftentimes when a new program is announced, maybe in the first year, there's a premium holiday. The early adopters will jump in. We know this with agricultural technology; I think of hybrid corn, for example. But there are those who are reticent and it's just something to consider. How do we encourage those who may not be convinced that it's worth their while to put up the money, the initial premium money, even though, as we know, it will be supported under the crop insurance model that we have through both the federal and the provincial government? So it's important to encourage farmers to buy into this new program if we can ensure that it's as good a program as it should be.

We assume that it's going to be implemented. We don't know the form. We don't know what additional agricultural commodities will be covered. All we have, really, is a piece of legislation that changes the name of the bill, changes the title. I made mention earlier that the importance of flexibility and continually adding on and improving—ginseng is a crop that came on more recently, a number of years ago. Last weekend we had a frost that killed off a lot of the ginseng. Down my way, that is a very big money crop. The prices are very good right now, and then you get hit by a frost. That's the nature of it. You get good prices and then you get wiped out by something else; perhaps it's a drought or something like that. So we can build on the experience with agricultural insurance going back to the 1960s as we go into this new approach.

We know that with any of these insurance programs, by and large, it's shared by the farmer, the provincial

government and the federal government with respect to crop insurance. The farmer pays 40%. The provincial government contributes 24%. The federal government contributes 36%. So we have that ratio: 40-24-36.

We know that in Ontario production insurance, as was just mentioned, currently is available for something like 90 commercially grown crops: obviously in the grain and oilseeds sector, corn, soybeans, winter wheat—a big participant in crop insurance—certainly fruit and vegetables, tree fruit, grapes, forage crops and the specialty crops like ginseng.

Honey, for example, is covered under crop insurance; flax is not. I received a few emails. I didn't realize that flax production was not covered by the crop insurance. So there's a bit of work to be done on the existing program, plus I consider that some fairly extensive work needs to be done to bring in a proper livestock and other commodity program, because we're opening the door, the assumption is, to hogs, cattle, sheep—again, what more do we need for bees? We hear so much about bee mortality. Beekeepers did not come forward to testify to ask for coverage for this mortality. I often wonder: Is what we've been hearing the last couple of years driven by the beekeepers or is it driven by other special interest groups perhaps making use of bee mortality for other purposes?

What about turkey and broiler operations? I think of the catastrophic losses in Oxford county.

Maple syrup: Will maple syrup be covered?

Another question: Can farmers do the paperwork themselves? How complex is this going to be? We're getting into a bit of new ground here. Do they have to hire an accountant? Many large operations have accountants anyway, but we have to make sure that this is as straightforward as possible and keep the red tape to a minimum.

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I did question the minister in the House formally. My question, again, was, "Will there be a premium holiday in the first year? Other questions: Will it be easy for farmers to forecast the amount and the timing of payments? Can the payments be processed rapidly to get them into the hands of farmers quickly? Will program calculations be clear and transparent? Will each participant get a detailed statement, something like, say, the income tax forms that we receive back?"

Traditionally, we think of crop insurance with respect to weather, pests, disease, and ideally it's cost-shared: producer, provincial and federal governments. The insurance model is a superior model. Whether it's government insurance or private insurance, it's superior to the ad hoc approach when disaster hits and taxpayers bail out. There really has to be participation from both sides or from all sides.

We know that farmers have requested production insurance plans beyond crops, for these additional products, and we know that Ontario, apparently, is the only province that does not have legislation enabling this to happen.

We think of some of the disasters in the past: the BSE that hit cattle wiped out half my cattle herd in Haldimand county and wiped out probably close to half of Ontario's cattle herd. And here we are now with reasonable or very good prices for cattle, and there could be a supply issue there.

Catastrophic poultry diseases like H5N2, avian flu: the recent outbreak in both turkey and broiler operations in Oxford county. And not all diseases are classified as reportable, like H5N2. If it's not classified that way, then the grower is not qualified for compensation. So will this program be able to adjust or fill in any gaps there?

We know that recently our hog industry had been hit by the PED virus. We lost something like 30% of our capacity to produce pork. Ontario Pork stressed the need for the province to take a look at mortality insurance. Again, speaking about risk management, one thing that always comes to my mind is the younger farmers, farmers I dealt with a number of years ago who were frozen out of a compensation program. This was because of a fall in hog prices back in 2007. They're still hanging out there, did not get the assistance they felt they should have received. I just received some communications about that in the last day or so.

Speaker, we went through clause-by-clause consideration of this legislation. We put forward a number of amendments; for example, that section 3 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"(8) Section 2.1 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

"Coverage for loss from catastrophic diseases"

Our purpose was to really stress on behalf of those sectors that have been subject to some of the losses like H5N2 that I just mentioned in Oxford county. These kinds of things make headlines around the world, and as a result you lose market around the world. Our relationship with the United States has worked out well on this one, and they've had some disastrous cases as well at the same time that we have had in Ontario. The understanding is that we can still export and import product beyond a certain zone, beyond the hot spot.

Again, it's a big hit on farmers. It's a big hit on exports. It's a big hit on our food industry. We know that the Toronto area is the largest hub for food production in North America, second only to Chicago.

In our comments on this amendment we put forward, my colleague Jim McDonnell stated, looking over the last decade or decade and a half that we've seen some of these catastrophes—the beef industry, as I mentioned, the dairy farms; BSE hit the dairy industry as well, with the cow cull business. Jim's brothers run a dairy operation, again, down in eastern Ontario—a big hit there. It was actually costing them money to ship young calves. They'd get a bill and really weren't getting much for it. There were people who went bankrupt, as we know.

In a case like that, it can encourage desperate measures. We hear stories—not in Canada—of identifying a disease and, like they say, they kind of dig a hole and "shovel and shut up" and try to hide it. We cannot have

that kind of behaviour either. We have government for a reason: to ensure that kind of behaviour doesn't happen.

It's the same with the principle of insurance: It encourages responsible behaviour as far as, say, vaccinating for BVD, bovine viral diarrhoea, something that hit cattle 20 years ago. Some people didn't vaccinate and had their herds wiped out. In the insurance program, you qualify and you make sure the due diligence is in place. So that's another value of these kinds of insurance programs. It's really incumbent on the applicant to do the right thing.

I recall Mr. Vanthof indicating he would vote in favour of this particular amendment with respect to some of these catastrophic diseases that may not be covered, say, by federal compensation. Again, it's one way to raise awareness, something we have to continue to think about in the future. Who knows what may yet arrive on our shores from elsewhere, or, say, through migratory birds? We want more discussion on that, to make sure there's no confusion. The government didn't vote for that amendment, by the way.

As we know—and this may have been mentioned so far with respect to any safety net initiative, like crop insurance. The words we think of are “stability, predictability, bankability.” It's very important: You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul. This was a concern on the part of the Christian farmers and the Grain Farmers of Ontario. They didn't want to see what is essentially a new program, a new draw on the treasury, plus a new draw on the pocket-book of the farmer. But, again, much of what we do here is, we're in the business of the allocation of scarce resources. We don't want to see a new program set up that would draw money away from an existing program like the crop insurance program.

Crop insurance—again, the success is something like 14,000 farmers signed up last year, with insurance coverage for five million acres across the province of Ontario. Again, a combination of perils that are covered: disease, fungal diseases, nematodes, insects of course, weather-related events—hail, flooding, wet weather; we had a very early snowfall last fall, as I recall, and last weekend's frost. It hit my area; it hit parts of eastern Ontario. Did you get frost up your way, off New Liskeard?

Mr. John Vanthof: Snow.

Mr. Toby Barrett: So you're dealing with insurance coverage across five million acres. That would include Rainy River and over on the Manitoba border. There's some good hay country up that way, and good livestock country as well.

We've got a program. We've got what I consider a time-tested model to follow. I always had good experiences when I bought crop insurance. My neighbour would sell it to me, and he knew what he was doing; I didn't have to do much, really. He knew my figures every year as I continued to build up my reputation, at that time with respect to both corn and soybeans, and winter wheat.

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So we've got a model. It works well for five million acres. It's a model that works well for 295 million acres

in the United States, and that really puts our Ontario agriculture into perspective. They have programs south of the border, safety net programs. Think of those great states like Iowa, with many, many feet of topsoil—in some areas, it's something like six feet of topsoil; we look at maybe six inches of topsoil—Illinois, Florida, North Carolina—not many people think of Florida as an agricultural state—and, of course, California. Agriculture is probably, I assume, the biggest industry in the state of California. There are programs there that cover 295 million acres. We're talking about expanding an existing program for crops on five million acres.

There's a downside, as well. A couple of years ago, the kind of safety net insurance programs in the United States cost the US farmer—and, I would assume, mostly the US government—\$14 billion. That can skew the marketplace, and we are part of that marketplace. When I sell corn or soybeans, I sell it on the Chicago price. The Chicago Board of Trade sets that price. There's a \$14-billion input into the marketplace on the US side of the border, and that has to affect us and our ability to compete in the province of Ontario.

One other point to consider: We know this present government is talking about a ban on the use of neonic insecticide on 80% of the acreage in Ontario. I raise this as a competitive issue as well. They grow corn in Illinois. They grow corn in Ohio and, obviously, Iowa. Those are the big plains states, the big cash crop states—same as soybeans. We import corn. We import soybeans. We export, as well. It moves back and forth across the border.

Corn that will be imported, and has been imported, from the United States is treated with the neonic insecticide. We're going to have to square that issue as well. We've got to deal with that. This government can ban neonics on 80% of the acreage, so we'll bring in corn from our competitors, who will be permitted to use neonics. I don't see how our program, if it goes through, is going to help bees in Iowa or Illinois, but my question is: How will it affect the Ontario cash crop farmer competing with a product that is able to use the most recent product with respect to the control of insects? It's more expensive to grow the product without neonics.

I assume that this program will probably be handed over to Agricorp. All of the ad hoc programs kind of get handed over to Agricorp. It's a bit of a scramble at times, and it's problematic. We've got to ensure that Agricorp has the resources to take on this new program.

Again, going back to 1996, the Mike Harris government established Agricorp. The principle is, there's an insurance fund. The value of the fund fluctuates from year to year, depending on claims, crop damage and premiums that come in from the farmers themselves.

United States crop insurance, as I understand it, by and large is administered through very large private insurance companies. There are about 11 very large insurance companies. They do the legwork. They understand the business; they're insurance companies.

Like any insurance product or anyone in the insurance business, you have to mitigate your own risk. You purchase reinsurance, for example. You need reinsurance.

It's a risk management tool. Reinsurance is essentially risk management for the insurance product, for the companies; or, in this case, it provides that kind of backdrop, back-office cushion for the farmer and for the government, the taxpayer themselves. We have to protect the taxpayer. We have to protect the province of Ontario as we protect our farmers from undue financial exposure.

The existing program is triggered when a producer's actual production falls below the guaranteed production. Again, we trust this expanded model will provide an adequate response with respect to any disasters that may occur in the livestock sector.

For farmers, business people, they have to make decisions. They have to make decisions on a good business case. That's what we have to provide beyond this legislation, through regulation and developing the further procedures and programs. It has to be transparent. Stability is so important—and the bank is important. Before the bank hands over money for so many commodities, they want to know if you've taken measures to mitigate any risk that you may have. Again, bankability is key.

Predictability: Farmers need to know when the money comes back in, if there is a draw on the program. They have to know how much would come back, given the unpredictability in farming as it is. And we cannot draw money away from other farm programs, something the grain farmers, the Christian farmers were concerned about.

Here we are, Speaker. We have enabling legislation that changes the title of the bill; I'll give it credit for that. And as the minister has admitted, Ontario is the only province without the legislative authority to offer production insurance for such a wide variety of other agricultural products. During the BSE time, there was a scramble, and help came through ad hoc money; it didn't come through farmers investing through their premiums. That gets to be a bit of a Wild West show when that happens. Sometimes, things don't work out as well as they could. The money came from the taxpayer. It had to be done in a hurry. It had to be done; if not, the whole industry would have collapsed. That was one concern. Again, federal government money came forward for that.

But the ad hoc approach is not the way to go, and our Minister of Agriculture has stressed that. But things happen. Plum pox virus, for example: People were not insuring much of their fruit crops. We have what I consider a well-thought-out, workable program with SDRM, self-directed risk management, with our fruit and vegetable industry.

It's so important. Even though all we're doing is changing the title of the bill, it's so important that we get this right and make sure farmers can forecast, if something does happen, how much they could receive in return for their investment in premium, and that they get it in an adequate amount of time that their bank would be happy with that—or other creditors. We do have to get this right and ensure that we can lift that load off the back of the farmer.

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Racehorses: I'm still unclear on the racehorse industry. There's private insurance certainly for a very high-priced racehorse. Is there room in this model, down the road, for our horse racing industry? They've gone through a very tough time, as we know, with the ending of the Slots at Racetracks Program.

I feel that we can get it right. The province of Ontario does remain an agricultural province, a food-producing province. Just down my way, I represent two counties, the sand plain in Norfolk and Haldimand and the hard blue clay in Haldimand county. We're blessed with a variety of soil types right across the province of Ontario. We have the microclimate and I think, most importantly, the know-how of generations of farming, of mechanical ability, the understanding and knowledge of agronomy, how to deal with machinery, how to deal with farm labour—something very important.

The productivity in North American agriculture really has been quite astounding, something that anyone running a government-offered program of any kind would be well advised to take a look at: the efficiency and effectiveness of those who are involved in farming.

I wanted to make mention of insurance for bee mortality. This is something where the government can play a larger role, in my view. There's certainly been lots of talk about bees for the last year and half. A lot of it is just that, talk, I suppose. We have government for a reason. The power lies in a majority government to take a look at something beyond honey insurance, to take a look at the bee insurance program—although beekeepers didn't come forward to testify. One would assume that they're worried about bee mortality, but nobody came forward to talk about mitigating their risk on bee mortality from the five or seven reasons that can set back hives.

To that end, we did put forward a motion during clause-by-clause. I won't get into reading the details of our motion—although this is kind of what we deal with day by day in our business here—but we wanted to pin down, in this case, partly for reasons of discussions, that “agricultural products” means “bees, hogs and any other product that is designated by regulation.” We fully support taking crop insurance beyond, and into livestock. We want it to be specific, given what has gone on in the last couple of winters with bee mortality, and to determine to what extent we now have an adequate program of insurance coverage for beekeepers.

The same with hogs; we made mention of hogs. Every year I attend my local regional hog producers' and pork producers' meeting. PED—I guess that would be two winters ago—obviously dominated discussion. We have to continue this discussion.

We know with Agricorp there's one program under production insurance that's titled “honey.” It's not titled “bees,” it's titled “honey.”

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: A little interjection across the way. We can see that in Hansard tomorrow if we want to.

I understand it's available for beekeepers who have a minimum of 50 beehives. Oftentimes we hear from bee-

keepers who have two hives, which is fine; that's great. Even the beehives on our farm—and I haven't counted them; I was working beside them during constituency week and there are certainly not 50 there. I don't consider him, really, a small beekeeper. So you have to have 50 hives to qualify for the program. We hear that there are problems—from people who have fewer hives than that. It's a program where you have to report what you're doing, you have to enrol, you have to sign up by the deadline—I just heard of an operation that did miss the deadline and then got in trouble later on this winter—you have to have adequate equipment.

This is a program that is registered under the Bees Act. It's not registered under the Crop Insurance Act. I hope the lawyers that worked on this have accommodated for this. I really didn't hear much about the Bees Act. I don't think this legislation amends the Bees Act. There are still some questions, but maybe this comes up at the regulation stage.

Further to some of the Agricorp documentation that's under the title "Production Insurance: Honey," again, we're expanding production insurance beyond crops to other products. It seems that honey is already covered but to what extent is it covered? Certainly in the west—in the Prairie provinces—Alberta, Manitoba have bee insurance programs; Saskatchewan has a pilot program. I've raised his in this Legislature. I've raised this in question period—that doesn't give the minister much time to respond. But again, under this Agricorp document there's a subtitle, "Losses due to uninsured perils such as improper use of pesticides." It doesn't talk about banning the pesticide, it talks about the improper use of pesticides. Spray drift is what comes to my mind. That was a big problem from what beekeepers were telling me. This was maybe seven years ago. We had some very serious problems down my way—this was before neonics were being used. With respect to spray drift, they were concerned that maybe it was with respect to sweet corn, and I know, talking to beekeepers, that many of them have moved their hives out of the sweet corn and potato areas over to the next county in my riding to a more suitable habitat.

That's why we've always had bees on our farms over the last 30 or 35 years, because of the particular habitat we have. We have gully land interspersed with cash crops, so we've planted a lot of trees and I've personally planted pussy willow and things like that to enhance the habitat. That's something that I would recommend to anybody who owns a house in town. Sure, you can mow every blade of grass you want, but you may want to put some other plants in for insects. There's not much foraging on Kentucky bluegrass for our honeybees.

Spray drift—I think that would be covered under the existing program; I'm not sure. If we don't use neonics, the systemic approach, that means going back to the highboy. The technology is there. That's aerial spraying. We can go back to using airplanes for that matter. Again, how adequate is our honeybee producers' coverage compared to those in the west?

During clause-by-clause again, my colleague Jim McDonnell commented on issues around bee population decline and recent hog issues with PED—really one of the big reasons why this legislation is brought up, and that's why they wanted to raise it in committee. These were two sectors that the public hears so much about.

We had public hearings on the bill both in Toronto and in Guelph. I know the Speaker attended one set of hearings in Guelph. There were three deputations in Toronto and there were two in Guelph. I thought there would have been more organizations come forward. I'm not saying they didn't show interest. I don't know whether it was a lack of adequate promotion. It wasn't necessarily rushed through; I'm not saying that. But, again, much of the priority of concern has been bees, hogs and, more recently, H5N2 with poultry. A couple of written submissions came in, a request around coverage for flax.

1640

I guess there is that expectation that what we produce now—this legislation may not come up again for another 19 years. I mean, that's the last time this came up. So it's important we make sure that we're doing this properly.

It was just last week that the White House task force on pollinators finally brought out their report, this Washington report. It underscores the diversity of factors that can impact pollinator health. It acknowledges that it's important to address all of these factors and the complex interaction between them.

As far as bee mortality, the task force identified a number of key stressors as part of a national strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators: (1) nutrition, focusing on adequate forage resources; (2) land policies and practices to increase forage and nesting habitats; (3) management of pests and disease; (4) pesticides; and (5) issues of rearing honeybees with respect to biology, genetics and breeding.

These recommendations out of Washington are apparently broadly consistent—I haven't gone through all of the reports—with the activities of Agriculture Canada and their Bee Health Roundtable that stands in marked contrast to what we're seeing in Ontario, with their focus on one issue, specifically the neonic group of insecticides.

Now, the White House report identified a target of reducing the over-wintering losses to 15% in 10 years, but it breaks it down in stages: 22% by the year 2020; 15% by the year 2025. It acknowledges these yearly fluctuations. This government has set what I consider an unrealistic target of 15% in a few years.

Again, on page 53 of this Washington report that just came out—I guess this would be the most recent addition to the debate—they acknowledge that "Pesticides play a critical role in agricultural production and the health of our society."

Another one of our amendments, Speaker: "Agricultural products' means hogs and any other product that is designated by the regulation." Again, we wanted to focus on bees; we wanted to focus on hogs. I may not

have time to go through so much of what hog farmers have suffered with respect to this viral disease, PED—a very, very high mortality rate. We lost something like 30% of the herd.

Again, with enabling legislation, it didn't give the deputants that came forward much to talk about, in a sense. They came forward to testify. They didn't spend their time talking about what the title of the bill should be changed to, obviously.

But back to bee deaths and what I consider, from what I understand, some very good programs in Alberta and Manitoba. Saskatchewan's is a work in progress. Maybe they've developed it by now; I'm not sure.

The Manitoba program assists with the financial burden of uncontrollable losses: over-winter bee mortality. Again, I think of last February most recently; that was really one of the worst Februarys I've seen on our farm, I guess, since the 1970s. They have options of the insurability: high-dollar or low-dollar coverage. They're paid an indemnity—"indemnity" is an insurance term for compensation—if the over-winter losses exceed the coverage deductible and the premium cost for the program. Again, it's that same ratio: 40-24-36. Alberta has a program similar to Manitoba. I do hope that those who are working on this will take a look at these kinds of programs.

The hog industry: Again, that was a very serious threat. That was quite a scare. Both federal and provincial governments stepped up—credit for that. The federal government immediately allowed a vaccine to be used as well.

BSE is the other one that still remains in people's minds with respect to our cattlemen. The vast majority of live animal exports go to the United States. Of course, Mexico and Japan—we had quite a market in South Korea. Back when I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, I know that the government did an awful lot of work with Korean beef buyers. I attended some of those meetings at a quite well-known Korean restaurant down near Christie Pits; we would get together down there.

The Canadian Animal Health Coalition pegged the total economic impact of the trade bans that occurred because of BSE at something like \$2.5 billion, and after two years we lost something like \$7 billion across Canada. There was no mortality insurance—no production insurance—to cover that. It was all an ad hoc program. It was a very serious situation that hit the beef industry and the dairy industry.

Going beyond beef, we're talking about a program that would theoretically cover much more than that; many other agricultural commodities.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario did testify. They fully support Bill 40 and this amendment to the Crop Insurance Act. They obviously look forward to working collaboratively with the province of Ontario. We'll all get a chance to chat with them at the beef barbeque on Wednesday.

Sheep producers: There was representation at the witness table. I grew up with sheep. There are so many

sheep diseases. Parasitic diseases: sheep nasal fly, blow-flies and various worms. You dip your sheep to try to kill them off. The Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency testified and gave us a bit of a history and an update on the economics of sheep production.

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I really regret that I'm running short on time, but one very important thing I do want to stress is coyote kill. Again, that's not specifically covered in this legislation. There were a few things I wanted to mention about that. As I recall, the third party supported the discussion about maybe getting away—in my view anyway—from this ad hoc approach to predator control for something like sheep. It's wolves, coyotes, the neighbour's German shepherd. We lost a number of sheep over the years for these reasons. The compensation seems to go municipality by municipality. I know that the Ministry of Natural Resources is involved. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food is involved. Maybe we could be doing sheep producers a favour to do some work on, again, a livestock insurance program, certainly to ensure that sheep producers are doing due diligence, that they have proper fences, like we never had when we raised sheep; I spent all my time on the neighbours' farms chasing sheep every night.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Baa-ad situation.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, it was a bad situation. You sound like a ewe I remember from years ago.

Anyway, maybe we can provide a service there to revisit the existing program. Obviously, MNR and agriculture and the municipalities have looked at the amount of compensation, the circumstances around it—often-times it's a local decision, which in many cases is a good decision—and better control. I'm a firm believer in the use of large guard dogs to protect sheep or donkeys; llamas are the other livestock out there as well. But I think there is a role for government because it does seem to be a problem. Through an insurance program, to qualify you have to have the best management practices, whether it's sheep or bees, and that makes for a better insurance program.

I think I would like to wrap up now. I know the member for Leeds–Grenville would like to make a few comments. If I've got any other important points, I'll try to squeeze them into my two-minute rebuttal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me to stand and provide a few moments of comments on Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act. I want to say that it's a pleasure for me to share my time with our critic, Toby Barrett. I listened to Toby's speech. He's just got a wealth of knowledge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would urge you to use ridings.

Mr. Steve Clark: Sorry; the member for Haldimand–Norfolk. Thank you, Speaker, for reminding me. He's done a great job in our caucus, making sure that members in agricultural ridings get out and see all the different commodity groups.

I know I've had a chance, both prior to second reading debate and after, to talk to many, many constituents who are going to be affected by this legislation. They all concur that it's time we start offering producers insurance for a broad range of agricultural products. I know that, as at second reading, it's refreshing to speak, as I do today, to a bill that has all-party support. I look forward to the bill moving forward and, ultimately, being passed, I hope, just as House leader, prior to us adjourning for the summer session. I can't speak for the government House leader or the NDP House leader, but I know that my producers and my constituents would sure love to make sure that this bill was in the mix and had received final third reading debate prior to us leaving some time in June.

The one complaint, though, as I said at second reading, was the length of time that it's taken for this bill to be updated. It's been since 1996. I think that too many times I've seen this government not being the leader on so many things, and I think when it comes to agriculture we have to continue to put our best foot forward. We've got a great province and a great agricultural industry, and I think we can't just lag behind. We've got to move forward and help change and transform our agri-food business.

Because of the delay, many farmers have talked to me about why it has taken so long. This was a recommendation back in 2003 by the federal-provincial task force.

I'm glad that the member for Haldimand-Norfolk mentioned neonicotinoids. I think one of the things that many of the farmers felt why there is such an urgency on Bill 40 today is because of the fact that they're trying to make a few brownie points with farmers, the fact that they threw science out the window as a government when they announced the 80% reduction in use by 2017. I think most folks in the agriculture community realized that they're glad they're finally implementing this crop insurance, but again, it has taken 12 years. It has taken 12 years since that 2003 policy framework from the federal and provincial governments to move forward.

Having said that, I'm glad that we can finally go back to our ridings—I know many of my colleagues have agricultural ridings—and say that there is something positive for them. I know in Leeds-Grenville, especially with the closure of Kemptville College there, the agricultural community is looking for a very positive move by the government, so this will move forward.

This is a sector that sustains 760,000 jobs in Ontario. It is directly responsible for \$34 billion worth of economic activity annually. During my second reading comments, I raised three main concerns that were brought to my attention by my constituents in Leeds-Grenville. Since the bill is being reported back without really any amendments, it's important for me, in the few moments that I have left, to put them on the record again. Maybe in the future this legislation, when it's reopened—and I hope it's not another 19 years before it's reopened again—some of those comments can be put forward to the governing party.

I also want to say—and the minister is here. He has been here throughout the debate. I want to congratulate him for doing that. Maybe some of these suggestions that are being brought up by the member for Haldimand-Norfolk and myself could be dealt with through regulations.

One of the concerns that I've heard is the cost of the program. Since the cost is shared, farmers carry the burden of 40%, the province 36% and the federal government 24%. The creation of a pricier program worries farmers. It also raises concerns, I think, about how the government is going to fund it.

What farmers have told me in my riding is that they don't want any existing program that they rely on from the Ontario government to be cut back and suffer because of this new program. It's important that the government remembers, when creating this funding model, especially given the current fiscal climate in Ontario, to continue to make a commitment in the agriculture sector. That's something that I've heard time and time again.

But the monetary cost is not the only concern that farmers have. There's also the concern—and the member from Haldimand-Norfolk touched on it—of the issue of filling out paperwork. All of the red tape that farmers are confronted with takes away from their time-consuming, vital farming duties.

Again, I want to quote to you a study that our previous critic, the member for Oxford, did, where he found that farmers in the province spent an average of 154.2 hours every single year filling out government forms. We have to ensure that this crop insurance act doesn't burden them anymore. I think we can all agree, from all sides of the aisle, that their time and effort are most valuable when they're geared towards their on-farm operations and not dealing with red tape and paperwork.

The big question is also one of incentive for farmers to buy into this program. How can we ensure that farmers make use of this new program? Could there possibly be a premium holiday, for example? It may be something for the minister to consider.

I'd also like to highlight the amendments. I know that the member for Haldimand-Norfolk did, but there were a number of good amendments that my PC colleagues put forward in committee. As MPPs who represent rural ridings, we have a significant relationship with the agriculture community, and it's obviously the sector that was affected by the bill. They've got the greatest stakes, so to me it's surprising that we go through this process. We had a government that tabled a throne speech that talked about partnership over partisanship, yet we weren't able to have any of those amendments passed at committee. Committee is the time that I think we need to flesh out some of these issues, to be able to work in a collaborative method.

1700

One of the highlights that concerns me is the regulations. It's outlined through section 11.1 of the bill, entitled "Regulations by minister." It reads like this, Speaker:

“11.1 The minister may make regulations,

“(a) designating agricultural products for the purposes of this act;

“(b) defining any word or expression used in this act that has not already been expressly defined in the act.”

Giving the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs the ability to ultimately create the new product insurance program comes with a responsibility to hear these recommendations in order to offer the best program possible.

Some of the amendments that we put in—the member for Haldimand–Norfolk talked about bees and hogs. There was a lot of debate at committee regarding including them in the regulations, again because of some of the honeybee deaths and because of some of the issues in the hog industry.

We’ve tried to be very pragmatic and progressive, to add some of these suggestions forward. Again, I just think the government needs to take a look at this. Obviously, section 11.1 gives the minister this opportunity, and I really think, given some of the issues that have taken place in the province, that he should do so.

Switching gears a bit, in my brief time left I wanted to talk about the inclusion of a subsection that provides coverage for loss from predators. It’s a big issue in my riding. I know that we’ve reached out to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, also the Minister of Natural Resources. We have a predation task force in Leeds–Grenville that’s worked very hard on a made-in-Leeds–Grenville solution. I know they’ve had a pilot project, and I hope that the Minister of Natural Resources allows them to continue the project.

But the one thing that I did bring up in second reading debate that I was disappointed with was the fact that I wanted the committee to travel at least one extra day. I really wanted them to come in my riding and go on the site at Kemptville College campus. As most of you know, last March the University of Guelph decided to announce the closure of the campus. I really had hoped that in the spirit of co-operation, the committee could have at least had one day where we could have come to that campus just so I could showcase it, Speaker, just so I could show members from all three parties what a wonderful campus it is and what wonderful opportunities are available.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I’d like to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and the member from Leeds–Grenville for their well-thought-out comments.

Agriculture certainly is the backbone of any province, of any country. I’m happy with the fact that the minister has taken an interest in this and he has moved in the right direction. I compliment the Minister of Agriculture for his efforts in this area because crops are very important. When you have a bad year, depending on the weather and with all the weather changes we’ve been experiencing in the last few years—crops are very susceptible to disease and drought. With this new crop insurance, it certainly is going to save a lot of young entrepreneurs and farmers

who want to get into the industry and are afraid to because they could lose their house, they could lose their equipment if things go bad for a couple of successive years; this insurance will protect them from any major losses.

I, too, am not happy that the agricultural college is closing in Kemptville. We have Guelph still, but Kemptville was good for eastern Ontario, and I think it would have been a lot easier on the pocketbooks of parents sending their young people to university or college in the area that is closer to home. I think that’s a sad day when that college will close.

Frankly, I think the more we encourage our young people to get involved in land use and agriculture, it’s going to be better for our grandkids and our kids down the road because let’s face it, Speaker: no food, no live; no water, no live. The bottom line is, you need these things. We all need it. It doesn’t matter what fancy inventions we come up with, God has provided us with these things, and we need the people who are going to work the land and take care of us.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: I was in the House to listen to the comments from my colleagues from Haldimand–Norfolk and, indeed, Leeds–Grenville. On the onset, I want to say they were very, very gracious remarks, by and large. They did provide some very good suggestions as we move forward.

Just to give a little background, I’ve been on the job some 11 months. One of the first things that I asked when I got the great privilege of being the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: “Tell me how many ad hoc programs we’ve had over the last 19 years.” So I looked at that very carefully and said that we have to make changes to the Agriculture Insurance Act in Ontario to get rid of the ad hoc programs, because that’s just not the way to treat Ontario’s agricultural sector. They need something that is stable and bankable that they can take when they’re sitting down, often in the spring of the year, to talk to their financial institutions in terms of determining the lines of credit that they need to operate their businesses in any given year. So I took that into consideration, and that’s why we brought forward the changes. We want to get these changes in place—I did so, after extensive consultation with all the commodity groups in the province of Ontario—to put forward a program that’s going to work on their behalf.

As I said, I really want to thank the two members for the comments they made, the honourable gentlemen from the official opposition—and I will hear, of course, a little later today, from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. This has been a very positive approach. I think we have a good piece of legislation as we move forward. I did take the comments seriously in terms of how we develop the regulations. I want to say to my friend from Haldimand–Norfolk that I was selling ginseng when I was recently in China, and the Chinese market recognized that ginseng grown here in Ontario is actually the very best in the world. So that’s another great opportu-

ity to further Ontario agricultural exports, particularly the ginseng field.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank them for the very positive comments this afternoon.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak briefly to Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996. I note that the bill would expand the act so that it would apply to all agricultural products that are designated by the minister by regulation.

I, first of all, would like to congratulate the members from Haldimand–Norfolk and Leeds–Grenville on their insightful comments. But in the limited time I have, I wanted to focus on honey, as last week in constituency week, in response to a constituent, I happened to tour the northern part of my riding and visit Board's Honey Farm in Restoule. I'm sure the Speaker is fully aware of that, because he goes up into that area on a regular basis. But it really relates to the matter that the member from Leeds–Grenville was bringing up, which is red tape. There is, I guess, a current Agricorp program that assists for loss of honey, and perhaps the minister can enlighten me a bit on it. In this case, at Board's, they toured their farm in January and didn't seem to have a problem. I guess there's a January 30 deadline for the program that you have to apply for. They didn't see any problem when they inspected their hives, so they didn't apply. Then when they looked at the hives later on, they found they had an 87% loss, but they had missed the deadline to apply. Now, whether it's their fault or whether it's the way the program is set up, I think certainly a communication of the rules could be improved upon so that when operations like Board's really need some assistance when they've had big losses, they can find it. I'm hopeful that this bill will take that into account and add some flexibility to the programs.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm happy to have a couple of minutes on Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act. So is this a winner? There have been some thoughtful comments on this today. Everybody seems to be somewhat happy that there's a framework in place. But let's be clear: It has taken 12 years to actually get here. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—I remember when he actually did his first lead on this—said, "First and foremost, I'm pleased to see the bill come to fruition after its impetus was passed 11 years ago at the federal-provincial agricultural ministers' meeting in 2003." Let's be clear that the Liberals have been in power since 2003. Actually, when the Premier was elected as leader of the party more than two years ago, she was the agriculture minister for a year, and since then, it's taken two more years for this to actually get to third reading.

1710

It's just a framework. The proof will be in the pudding, as they say, at the end of the day, depending on

what the program looks like, how much money is put to it, what the regulations look like. I think that's when there may be time to celebrate or not celebrate.

As the member from Stoney Creek said, we've had a couple of bad winters. I know in Niagara there are big concerns about whether we'll have a cherry, peach or apricot crop this spring. I think this is certainly going to be important to farmers in Niagara and across this province going forward. I know it's going to be important to the grape growers as well in the Niagara region.

I hope that it doesn't take 12 years to actually get the plan and the program in place, so that the expanded act will actually assist farmers in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe that concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for his reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Leeds–Grenville and myself, we appreciate some of the feedback.

It has taken 12 years. That federal-provincial agricultural policy framework was in 2003. I think the OFA pointed this out in their testimony. The APF, as it was known back then, kind of redefined or rebranded crop insurance as production insurance—I refer to it as production insurance; we're debating a bill called agricultural insurance—that offered federal funding for premiums on eligible livestock insurance plans. As has been pointed out, Ontario has yet to take up those opportunities under the current framework. The way these programs go, they're going to be changed and redefined again in the federal election coming up. Who knows what may be announced in the coming months? And that's our role.

Many people out there, the commodity groups—it's almost like they assume, "Well, this is fine. You just transfer the coverage to livestock." It's fairly simple, like the transfer of ginseng. But the complexities of dealing with animals and livestock and diseases—there are going to be snafus.

The OFA pointed out work that needs to be done. They surveyed their members fairly recently, and they feel that business risk management is falling short for their needs. Production insurance scored very high, as I recall; AgriInvest scored very high; and the remaining program, the whole farm program, AgriStability, got very low marks. So we have to look at this and the complexity of the whole system of risk management.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House and represent my NDP caucus colleagues, and today it's a special honour to be able to speak about my favourite subject, agriculture, and Bill 40, which is maybe not my favourite subject but is a very important subject to agriculture. I regret that I have but 45 minutes to speak on this subject today.

The travel of this bill through this House and through committee has been an interesting experience. If you recall, when this bill was first introduced, some of the comments from the government side were that they were

acting with lightning speed. They got a universal guffaw from this side, because it was approved in 2003 and the other provinces have all acted. I notice now that they're speaking about the evolution of the program, and that's a good sign, because it shows they are realizing that the agricultural community wants the real thing. When you say stuff like you're "moving with lightning speed," they know it's not right and they know it's a press release.

Most farmers back home want to be dealt with directly and want to be dealt with forthrightly. When you start off with stuff like "lightning speed"—I'm sure the minister realizes—it doesn't look good for the government. The fact that they're toning down the rhetoric a little bit—that's where I'll start—is a good sign.

Agriculture is a huge industry in this province. Judging by what figures you look at, it's number one or number two: \$34 billion; 760,000 jobs. It's a big deal, and it's always been a big deal. It's kind of odd, for someone who has been immersed in agriculture his whole life, that when some of the other manufacturing sectors had their problems, everyone seemed to discover agriculture. But agriculture was always there, and it continues to grow because people continue to need to be fed.

Also, there continues to be more uses for agricultural products, because agriculture is truly the bio-economy. Things that are used in the agriculture sector—that are created in agriculture—tend to be able to break down easier in the future. We hear about car manufacturing companies now making car parts out of soybean because soybean breaks down when the car is no longer a functioning thing; you can recycle that. It's things like this that people don't really think about but that we are coming to realize are much more important.

There were a couple of comments that the minister made today that I would like to comment on. Also, I would like to commend the minister: It's a great sign of respect to be in the House when your bill is being discussed. I commend that.

He stated that farmers in other sectors are at a disadvantage because this hasn't been implemented. I agree, and I commend him for recognizing that. He said he has only been minister for 11 months but he has recognized that, and I commend him for that.

One thing about agriculture is that we need programs that are stable and bankable. Thinking back, one of those programs is our risk management program. Agriculture is a complex industry, and the programs and dealings with the government are also very complex. While we're talking about Bill 40, which is basically a production insurance framework, risk management is more of an insurance program for price volatility.

The commodity organizations and previous ministers got together and created one of the most effective risk management programs in the country. It was a very good program. It still is a good program, but the program, when it was originally designed, wasn't capped. There are years when the program needs more than where it is capped at, and there are years when it needs less. If you

look at the budget this year, they're projecting that it's not going to reach the cap.

If you think about it, that program was only truly bankable and predictable when there was no cap. The fact is that when they're predicting it's not going to use the full cap, that means the program was designed very well. But in years when it's truly needed, farmers are artificially held back. So that program is not truly stable or bankable in bad years. Where that's really important and where it came up many times during the committee hearings—and I'm planning to go through the committee testimony—right now, the Crop Insurance Act covers, I believe, 90 crops, and it could be expanded. Under this framework, it will cover many more sectors, or it could, but that money has to come from somewhere. The provincial government is going to have to come to the table with some money. Some of that money could be coming from money that now goes to ad hoc programs. I think that's a good switch. If it's an effective program, where you no longer need ad hoc programs, that's a good switch. But that's not a guarantee.

What the people who now deal with agriculture programs, like risk management—one of the things that consistently came out is that they were worried and continue to be worried, as are we, where the money is going to come from; that it doesn't somehow come from another agriculture program—for instance, risk management, because if you take money from risk management to increase more production insurance for more sectors, that could be a net loss to the agricultural sector as a whole. That's not a gain. The devil is always in the details. It hasn't been made clear. We fully realize that there have to be negotiations with the other sectors, but we need a direction as to where that money is actually going to come from. Farmers need that, all the ag sectors need that, because otherwise you're negotiating for naught. We need that from the start. It's very important.

I'd like to go through some of the comments from the committee hearings. As you know, for the people at home, the way a bill goes through the House, the short form: first reading is basically a formality; second reading—we debated this bill in second reading. I think we had universal support of the principle behind this bill. This bill is enabling legislation that, after negotiation with commodity groups and others, is going to allow more agricultural products to be covered by production insurance. That's the role. It's enabling legislation. I don't think anyone is against the principle of the legislation. That's not a problem.

Again, a problem is where the funding is going to come from, but the biggest issue—I'm going to back up for a second. To put this into perspective, I'm going to talk about, since I have another 40 minutes—

Mr. Michael Harris: Take your time.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm going to take my time. I'm going to talk about what happened in Timiskaming this spring. For those people who don't know about where I come from—people who think there is no agriculture in northern Ontario are very wrong. There's agriculture

throughout northern Ontario, but the most concentrated part is over the hill in Timiskaming.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Famous Clay Belt.

Mr. John Vanthof: It is.

It was a very odd year this year, because the first machines that came out this spring were the combines, to get the crops that were still salvageable from last year. The quality wasn't there anymore, but where it could be marketed, the combines went out. The seeding equipment went out and everything. It was a beautiful spring this year until frost.

Hon. Jeff Leal: May 14.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, and we've had several since.

The odd thing about the frost—and it's a really odd thing about agriculture—is that you'd think in northern Ontario the frost would have affected everywhere, and it didn't. Even corn and soybeans—some were affected and some weren't. That just shows how intricate and complicated and hard to understand agriculture and growing things is. It's a really complex structure. Some of the farmers who couldn't get their crop off last year—and, as the minister will recall, we talked to him about it. It was an exceptional problem in Timiskaming last year. It has never happened to that degree. So they went and got their crop—and some of those same guys now, and those who have production insurance, hopefully will be able to claim. Some of their crops have been wiped out again. It's early enough. Farmers are a breed. They have no bound of enthusiasm and optimism, and they will seed again. The reason that they have no bound of optimism is because occasionally—a lot of times, actually; more than occasionally—we have good crops.

But it shows how—if you look at how a field grows, you look at a region, there are micro-climates where I live, so I'm sure there are micro-climates across the province—blanket solutions don't work. That's what is so crucial with bills like this: that the regs and the tools be nimble enough to actually reflect the needs of the province.

One sector that would benefit from this is the beef sector. Right now, maybe they don't need it. Right now, things are doing well in the beef sector. But the beef sector was decimated by BSE. I know; I was in the dairy sector during that. I can remember that we sold a cow the week before BSE was announced. I can't remember exactly what the gross was, but I know that in my pocket was \$952. The same cow, two weeks later—not the same one, but the equivalent one—I think we had a cheque of about \$8.

When you drive through my riding—there used to be beef cows throughout my riding. The typical beef farmer had a job in the mill or a job in town, and he had 50 or 60 beef cows. That wasn't really enough to make a living, but for those of us who liked to farm, it was a great hobby. At the end of the year, you sold your calves and you bought a tractor or whatever. But for those years of BSE, you toiled after work, you spent hours and hours taking care of your cows and your fences, and then you had to pay a bill at the end of the year instead of making

any money. That's why the cows are gone. Now we have a shortage of cows. That's why the price is up.

For those of you who are hoping to enjoy some nice steaks on the barbeque this spring, I would advise you to buy them now, because the expensive beef is just starting to come into the system now. If you learn one thing today—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Get your steaks today.

Mr. John Vanthof: Get your steak now. If you see a sale on hamburger—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Buy it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Buy it now if you have a big freezer, because the expensive beef is coming.

You know what? The people who produce that beef need it. They need it because they have suffered and suffered and suffered. If something like BSE happens again—and it has happened, maybe not to the same extent, but PED in pork and avian flu in birds. It has happened since. So if this bill leads to programs that actually can help farmers with that—if something had existed during the BSE crisis, maybe we'd still have a lot of those farms in my riding and in ridings across the province.

We can't look back, because we can't fix what happened, but we can use that experience to try and make it so it doesn't happen again. That's one of the benefits of this if we actually get the regulations right. There's no problem with the bill, but the bill without the regulations is just not going to work.

We had, I believe, two days of committee hearings. One was in Toronto and one was in Guelph. One of the people who came to the hearings in Guelph was, I believe, Lorne Small from Christian Farmers. Lorne made the comment—he thanked the members of the committee because he was so used to coming to Toronto that it was refreshing, actually, that people wanted to talk about agricultural issues outside, that Queen's Park actually came to the country. I think that's something we should recognize. It's too bad that the budget hearings weren't held throughout the province.

1730

I don't want to turn this into a partisan debate because I think this one shouldn't be, but on agricultural issues, the true heart of agriculture doesn't happen in this chamber. To truly understand agriculture, we have to go outside of this chamber, and not just the people who work for the ministry and not just the minister but members, because I think members—the more we appreciate other sectors, the better regs we'll make, the better laws we'll make. We don't make the regs. The minister and cabinet make the regs. In this case, we make the enabling legislation.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention one area that's probably the hottest topic in agriculture right now, in cropping agriculture right now and in the beekeepers, and that's neonicotinoids—systemic pesticides. The government has decided to try to cut the use of neonics. We're not opposed to that. But where we really have to work on is to make sure that the regs actually work at the farm

level, because if they don't work at the farm level, we're just kidding ourselves and we're not protecting anybody or anything.

Every time I hear—and this has happened so many times—that we are going to have the strongest regulations in North America, I always want to ask, “But do they work?” I don't mean this as a slight. There are ways to make sure that regulations—I'll be clear. The people who use neonicotinoid insecticides, including myself, don't like the legislation, but we can live with the legislation, provided that the regulations actually work. The grain farmers in this province who use these pesticides—we are putting them at a competitive disadvantage. We need to recognize that.

If you'll remember my story about how the frost affected one place differently than the other place, it's the same with pesticides. Some places need them and some places might not need them, and it also depends on the weather. If you have a really wet year, you might need them more, but you won't know that ahead. Somehow we have to recognize that. If we can't find ways to alleviate that, then we're going to have to recognize that somehow there's going to have to be some kind of compensation program. Hopefully, we can work that into agriculture insurance, because if we don't, we are going to go back to, if a farmer has to protect his crop to make his mortgage payment—that's as simple as it is—he will be forced to perhaps use something that's more damaging than neonics.

I can remember, when I used to grow canola, that we used organophosphates. You mixed them in yourself, and that was wasn't good for anybody. Then, later on, they were mixed together, but you needed to wear a gas mask. Most of us didn't, but when you turned the corner, when you did the headlands and the wind was blowing the wrong way, you got sick sowing canola. Neonics were a huge improvement.

They're a good tool. Should we be very careful how we use them? We should be very careful with any pesticide. But again, it comes down to the regulations, because if the regs don't work, things will happen and you really won't know what's going on. That is the same with this bill: If you're going to come up with more sectors and insure more sectors, you've got to make sure that the regs actually work.

I believe the member from Haldimand-Norfolk brought up BVD. You can vaccinate for BVD in cattle. A big wave of BVD went through Ontario. I remember that. We vaccinated our herd. We vaccinate our herd every year, and we didn't have a problem, but some who didn't had a huge problem. Again, if you look at how the system works, should the person who vaccinates help pay the extra costs of the people who don't vaccinate? No.

Sometimes the Conservatives and us disagree on the amount of regulation, the amount of paperwork. But there has to be a detail so that if you're going to participate in a program where you insure cattle, and cattle are a bigger risk if you don't vaccinate, somehow you have to be able to prove that you vaccinated those cattle to be

able to participate in that program. There are times when you need paperwork.

It's just like regulation; it has to work on the ground. The trick is, the amount of paperwork or the amount of regulation—there has to be some kind of correlation with the level of risk. As a farmer, you get extremely frustrated when you fill out three different sets of paperwork that are basically saying the same thing and it doesn't really make anything any safer.

But there are programs that are definitely necessary. We have the safest food system in the world. I truly believe that, even though I don't like it when people say we have the best regulations. I feel totally safe eating Ontario food. Having been in the milk industry and the cash crop industry, I feel totally safe. Part of the reason is because we have a high level of regulation. What's frustrating, again, is when the level of regulation doesn't match the level of risk.

I'll give an example. In my opinion, and hopefully the opinion of my caucus, we overregulated small abattoirs to a point. What happened? Right now we have slaughter going on with no inspection.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No way. Really?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. There is a huge lack of abattoir capacity in this province. It's not that the government was trying to destroy mom-and-pop abattoirs, but when a mom-and-pop abattoir needs to have his-and-hers washrooms, stuff like that, they just throw up their hands in frustration, because there's not a whole lot of money in those businesses.

Did that make that type of food any safer? No. We would have been better off to have regulation that equalled the level of risk and tried to keep as many of those abattoirs in business as possible. That's just one example; there are other examples. It's a hard issue to explain, but it's very crucial. I'm really looking forward to working with as many people as I can on this to make sure that the regulation equals the level of risk.

It's the same with neonics. The government has made their decision. That decision is passed. The regs aren't passed.

An example—and I fully support grain farmers in this—is the EBR. If you're really serious about getting the input of farmers on a set of regulations that's going to impact them severely, and you put this on the Environmental Registry for comments, and you make them comment at the busiest time of the year, when the combines and the seed drills and everything are flying across the fields—really? Sure, the lobby groups are going to have time, and not just the environmental lobby groups but the farm lobby groups have time, too. But the people who actually need to make the regulations work—the farmers—who actually would have some of the best comments, saying, “You know what? Maybe this doesn't work. Maybe that doesn't work, but maybe we could do this”—they don't have time. The fact that that was done demonstrated that someone didn't really care what the farmers thought, because that was more of a slap in the face than anything else.

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I have farmed for a long time; I've lobbied for a long time. The reason I ended up here is because I did a lot of lobbying, but even I, when I was full-time farming, wouldn't step off the tractor to make a nice EBR thing about neonics in the busiest time of the year because if you miss a couple of hours, you miss that window. You'll have years to comment because you won't make your mortgage payment if you don't get your crop in on time.

We need to make sure that those regs actually reflect what farmers can provide, because they might be able to do a much better job than people in the ministry think they can do. If you look at neonics, the acute poisoning of neonics, when the dust—or the bees—farmers reacted very quickly with that. They recognized the problem and realized that it was because their equipment had changed. It didn't take long. They figured it out and the acute poisoning stopped very quickly. That wasn't a regulation; that was people working together—"Okay, we've got the air seeders. The air seeders make too much dust. We'll fix that." The old-fashioned planters, the plate planters, didn't make dust.

There are other ways, but if you make these regs when people are too busy trying to make a living, it's not going to work. That's with all legislation, but it's really glaring, maybe because some of us have been in the field and we see that just piling regs on top of regs sometimes doesn't make things any safer. That's something we really have to work on. We really have to work on this with this bill.

I'll go back to the cattle example. Do I believe farmers need to take responsibility for what they do to work with society and to be able to qualify for programs? Of course. If there is a beef program, should farmers be able to document that they've done all the things they can to protect their own herds? Definitely. But then the government has to say, "Okay, but what is the best way to implement that program?" Judging by the way that the neonic regs have been done so far, it's not a good bellwether.

There is still time to actually reach out. The minister, the ministry—the government may very well be doing that this time, but the fact that the EBR—that the comment period was held in the middle of seeding—for people who have never worked in agriculture, there are certain times a year when you focus on one thing. For those of us in the House, it would be like the writ drops and you've got an election of 30 days, and, "Oh, by the way, we're going to re-side the house." No, we're not going to re-side the house in an election campaign. Seeding on a farm is like that. You've got a window when you're going to seed, and then the government comes out, "Oh, by the way, we would like you to comment on the new neonic regs." It's not going to happen, and somebody knew it wasn't going to happen. That is an issue.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That's a conspiracy—

Mr. John Vanthof: Whether it's an omission or conspiracy, it's a problem.

You know, we really, really need to work on that—it's not a partisan thing; it's not—because these regulations

affect the industry; they affect the health of people and of pollinators. We've got to make sure that they work. Is everybody going to like them? No. On these issues, we're not out to make the most friends. But we've got to make sure that they work, and that they just don't work for—I don't like the word "ban," because it wasn't a ban. It was a severe restriction, and in some cases, it could be a ban. But to really work—I'll give you an example with neonics: If I remember correctly how it's supposed to work is, you can do your own—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Analysis.

Mr. John Vanthof: —analysis. Thank you, Minister. Thank you very much.

Then, every third year or so, you need an independent analysis, but the independent analysis has to be done by someone who is not affiliated with any—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Lobby group.

Mr. John Vanthof: No—company that deals with neonics.

I farmed for a long time, and I used an ag adviser for almost my whole career. My dad didn't believe much in ag advisers, but I do. But—at least in my part of the country—there aren't very many independent ones, because you can't make a living being an independent ag adviser. These people are certified professionals, so why would they—they know the regs that are out there; they have no reason to fudge the numbers just because they work with the co-op or work with Pioneer, you know? If you're a professional, you're a professional—

Ms. Cindy Forster: And your credibility is on the line.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. That's an issue. And, again, it's very time-sensitive; when you do these analyses, there's only so many of these people around, you know? That's an issue.

The same with, if you show that you need neonics on one field one year, and then the next year, because you used neonics, you don't have a problem, well then, in year three you can't use them again. There's got to be some way to devise a way to make sure that where they're needed, that the regimen that we're implementing actually makes sense and that it provides accurate results and it isn't just put in place to appease people. That might be a harsh word, but regulation for the sake of regulation isn't protecting the environment. These have got to be tough regulations. I'm not discounting that, but they've got to work.

I know I'm spending a lot of time on this issue, but this issue never made it to the House—but issues like this will make it. The Agriculture Insurance Act made it to the House because it has to be changed to cover more commodities, but the regs aren't going to make it to the House. So we've got to make sure that the regs make sense. It came up again and again. It came up with the pork producers, it came up with the sheep producers, with the OFA, with the Christian farmers—they're all in favour of Bill 40. Like I said in my first hour on this, I don't think I could find a farmer who would be against Bill 40—maybe a couple; farmers are a contrary bunch. I

could probably find a farmer who was against Bill 40. But, again, they were all really concerned with where the finances were going to come from to pay for Bill 40. The minister said that there was no direct cost to the government in his opening remarks on third reading; no immediate cost to the province. That's because this legislation by itself doesn't do anything. That's why there's no immediate cost to the province. That's not a misrepresentation at all. The fact is that this legislation by itself doesn't do anything that's not being done already.

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I fully expect and hope that the government tries to work with the commodity organizations to cover more sectors like pork and beef. There are crops like flax. Flax is a big one in my area. There's no coverage.

When the province has to pay their—is it 26% that the province pays? I believe so. When the province has to cough up their 26%, where is it going to come from? If you're just going to take it from risk management, that could be a net loss. If you're going to close Ridgetown to pay for it, that's a net loss. If you're going to take a few programs out of the University of Guelph to pay for it, that's a net loss. That came through again and again and again. The devil is in the details. One of the biggest details in the government, especially a government that has some problems with how they spend money and where their priorities are—people are concerned.

One of the presenters in Guelph was the Grain Farmers of Ontario. The Grain Farmers of Ontario were concerned because they're on the flipside. They're already covered. They're covered by production insurance, and they're covered by risk management. If you want to pay the price, you're pretty well covered, except you're not covered if you have crop loss from the fact that you can't use neonics, not really; you can't insure yourself high enough to cover that, but anyway. Their concern again is, if you're going to increase the coverage to other sectors—they didn't want to hurt other sectors—where is the money going to come from? If it's going to come from their pot, it's a direct loss to them.

One thing that someone, I believe Amy Cronin from the pork board, brought up—she did a very good presentation. She brought up that because some sectors are covered and other sectors aren't, even within the same area, it creates unfair competition. Although people who drive by a country road might think, “Oh, the country is so idyllic. You've got a few dairy farmers over here, and you've got corn farmers over there. Over there is a beef farmer”—you think, “Oh, these people are all happy, and they get along.” They do. Country people work very well together. But it's incredibly competitive. They compete for land. They compete for custom workers. They compete for everything.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Water.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, they compete. If a piece of land comes up for rent, depending on what crop prices are, there's a big competition. If it comes up for sale, there's a big competition. So when some farms are covered and other farms aren't, that creates inequality.

If a farmer chooses not to be covered, because crop insurance now—how many acres does it cover? Five million? There's a lot more acres in Ontario than five million. If you choose not to be covered, that's your own choice. But if you're in a sector that can't be covered, that's kind of unfair competition.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, and she mentioned that. They have a crop side, and they have a very successful pork side. She mentioned that, and that one struck a chord with me, because it is—farming is a very competitive business, not only with other countries but within the rural roads of Oxford, of Elgin, of Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Huron—Bruce. It's competitive, and she brought that up.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Steve Clark: Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, okay. I need a couple more minutes, guys. Can I name them all?

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I mentioned Oxford. I mentioned Oxford.

I'm glad that my speech is split in two so I've got a few minutes to regroup.

It came out again and again: Where is the money going to come from, and how are the regulations going to be developed? We've got a good base to work from. The member from Haldimand—Norfolk mentioned the crop insurance, that what's covered now is a very good program. It is. I've participated in it my whole career. One of the reasons I've participated my whole career is, for most of my career, I was pretty heavily leveraged, and the only way you could get money to put a crop in was to make sure it was insured so the bank knew they were going to get their money out.

But again—

Hon. Jeff Leal: You've got to look after those bankers.

Mr. John Vanthof: I come back to the bankers a lot.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, you guys do a good job of that.

But again, if you're in a sector that isn't covered, if you're in the pork sector, try going to the bank and saying, “I need to do this and this and this, and if things really hit the fan, then maybe the government will show up with an ad hoc program.” That won't work.

There is a need for this program, but there is a greater need for the government to identify where the money is going to come from. When I see in the budget, and I mentioned this earlier on in my speech, that one of the places the government identifies major savings is that they have to spend less money on agriculture programs, that doesn't tell me that they're planning on funding this. That tells me the opposite. When I read it, that tells me the opposite.

Something else I've learned in my 30 years in agriculture is that it's very dangerous to base your cash flow on how great agriculture is going to do in the next year. As we saw with the frost, it doesn't take much to turn the tables. Where you have to make sure it's solid is—if the production part of agriculture isn't solid and stable, those 760,000 jobs aren't going to be stable either.

I see the Speaker looking at the clock. Can I sit down and keep my 15 minutes? Perfect.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 6:45 p.m.

The House recessed from 1757 to 1845.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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| French, Jennifer K. (NDP) | Oshawa | |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
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| Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Oxford | |
| Harris, Michael (PC) | Kitchener–Conestoga | |
| Hatfield, Percy (NDP) | Windsor–Tecumseh | |
| Hillier, Randy (PC) | Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington | |
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| Martow, Gila (PC) | Thornhill | |
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| McGarry, Kathryn (LIB) | Cambridge | |
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère
sexuel**

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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