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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 23 February 2017

Jeudi 23 février 2017

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 February 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 février 2017

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA NÉGOCIATION
COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS
SCOLAIRES

Ms. Hunter moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 and make related amendments to other statutes / *Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la négociation collective dans les conseils scolaires et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister Hunter.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm proud to rise this morning in the House to speak in support of proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014. If passed, these proposed amendments will strengthen our made-in-Ontario approach to bargaining in the education sector. Specifically, they will make improvements to flexibility, transparency and to consistency.

Today, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague parliamentary assistant Granville Anderson, the member from Durham. Together, we will lay out the rationale and the importance of each proposed amendment, and we will speak to those who ultimately benefit from improving the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act: Ontario's two million students and their families, all of whom rely on a strong, stable and sustainable publicly funded education system each and every day.

When the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act was first introduced in 2013, it was born out of collaboration with our education partners. At that time, all parties to collective bargaining in the education sector understood that change was necessary. Until then, and for too long, we had worked with a bargaining process that was outdated and did not reflect the realities of our publicly funded education system. As it stood, prior to the act, collective bargaining in the education sector was a fairly

undefined process, one undertaken with the best of intentions, but one ultimately lacking in consistency and clarity of roles.

That is because, back in 1998, under the previous government, local school boards were stripped of their taxation powers, while maintaining their status as the employer in bargaining. From 1998 onwards, local school boards continued to bargain collective agreements with local unions. However, the removal of school boards' taxation powers made them dependent on the province for their funding, including funding for collective agreements. And yet, the province did not have a formal role in collective bargaining.

This was an unsustainable framework and needed to be addressed. Taking action, our government created the provincial discussion tables, or PDT, a format for voluntary collective discussions. In 2004 and 2008, working together with teachers' federations, education worker unions and school boards, our government facilitated agreements that met the needs of employees and boards while ensuring the continuity of excellence in education services for students and families.

The PDT helped bring the unions and the school boards together, with the government acting as a facilitator, to reach province-wide agreements on core issues of provincial significance such as compensation. Through this process, by working closely with our partners and making meaningful investments in our schools and students, Ontario's education sector went from being a system beset with labour strife to becoming one of the most revered publicly funded education systems in the world.

The 2004 and 2008 PDT agreements allowed for a prolonged period of stability in the education system, during which time our government implemented bold initiatives and reforms. These resulted in the creation of full-day kindergarten, smaller primary class sizes, higher test scores in reading, writing and math, and an increased graduation rate, supported by innovative new programs like dual credits and Specialist High Skills Majors, initiatives that we're all proud of. The provincial discussion tables made sense of an outdated bargaining model and laid the groundwork for what has become a world-class publicly funded education system.

In the years that followed, it became clear to all parties that the PDT model, which at one time had been so innovative, needed to be updated and formalized. That is why we pledged to establish a new legislative framework for provincial bargaining in the education sector—a framework that would establish a clear process for addressing key issues and define the roles and the

responsibilities of all parties, a framework that clearly recognized boards as employers and clarified the government's role in bargaining, as the funder.

At the same time, we sought to reinvigorate our partnerships, understanding that positive labour relations, mutual respect and common goals are fundamental to sustaining the quality of our publicly funded education system. To that end, we engaged our partners in two ways.

The first was to collaborate on a renewed vision to guide our education system to new heights. After extensive input from all parties, including students, teachers, principals, education workers, trustees and school boards, we released *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*. This collaborative document, which still guides us today, underscores our commitment to student achievement and well-being, with a commitment to cultivating and continually developing a high-quality teaching profession. Key to that, of course, was following through on our pledge to modernize collective bargaining in the education sector.

Madam Speaker, what brings me to the second way we engage our partners. I'm talking, of course, about the consultations that would eventually result in the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014. These extensive consultations allowed the province to put into law a bargaining framework in which all parties could see their input and ideas reflected in legislation. Importantly, the act clarified the roles of the crown and the employers. It also formalized two-tier bargaining, and it gave definition to many previously undefined aspects of bargaining, such as how central and local issues are determined, what happens in times of dispute or disruption and much more.

0910

The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act was the new governing framework for challenging talks during challenging times. And despite those talks being lengthy and robust, the act was up to the task. The act facilitated the return to a strong, dynamic, creative and collaborative partnership between the government and its education sector partners. This is evident in the first-ever central agreements reached under the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, which achieved positive outcomes across the education sector as well as the transformation and streamlining of health, life and dental benefits plans.

The central agreements also addressed a range of issues with a direct impact on the classroom, including class sizes, full-day kindergarten, professional development and more. Importantly, the agreements also included the commitment from teachers and education workers to continue to work collaboratively with school boards and the Ministry of Education to deliver on *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, thus demonstrating that on the basis of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, all parties were able to engage in challenging talks during a period of fiscal restraint and to reach agreements that were responsive to the province's fiscal plan while maintaining a focus—a strong focus—on achieving excellence, ensur-

ing equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence.

As positive as the ultimate results were and as strong as the process has been shown to be, it was always understood there would be opportunities to improve the act going forward. That is why both the Premier and the previous Minister of Education, whom I would like to thank and to recognize for their leadership and their efforts on this act, committed to a review of the legislation. I am proud to say that we have followed through on that commitment and have extensively consulted with our partners over the past year and have heard their inputs, focusing on what worked and what could work better in the future.

I would again like to thank our partners for sharing their feedback on the first round of bargaining under the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. Thank you so much to all of our education partners for your collaboration and your input and for their ideas on refining the bargaining process while maintaining the core of what all parties agree is effective legislation.

Based on our consultations and informed by our partners' input, we have developed a set of proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act that we believe will enhance this already effective bargaining framework. These amendments were also developed in response to issues raised by the Auditor General. If passed, the proposed amendments will build on an already successful model for collective bargaining, with enhancements to flexibility, transparency and consistency.

Madam Speaker, specifically, the amendments I am proposing today for your support, and for all of the honourable members' support, include:

- ensuring parents and students are well-informed in advance of labour disruptions by requiring an additional five days' notice for strikes and lockouts in certain circumstances. This is in addition to five days of notice already included in the act;

- requiring trustees' associations to report on their use of public funds that they receive, including bargaining costs and salaries for labour relations employees exceeding \$100,000, as a means of improving transparency;

- requiring participation for all education-sector unions in central bargaining to support improved consistency across agreements. Why is this important? It's important to provide consistency on important central items such as compensation;

- ensuring that any bargaining unit formed during the term of a collective agreement is subject to the central terms negotiated by its applicable teachers' federation or education workers' union. This supports improved consistency and equity;

- allowing the government, or the applicable employer bargaining agency, to receive updates on the status and progress of local bargaining and for the crown or employer bargaining agency to assist with local negotiations, upon request, as a way to support improved transparency and consistency;

—granting the central parties and the crown with the ability to file an application with the Ontario Labour Relations Board to resolve perceived conflicts or inconsistencies between central and local terms within a collective agreement;

—changing language from “consent” to “mutually agree” in certain areas where trustees and the crown engage in joint decision-making;

—clarifying the Minister of Education’s delegation authority and the role of the Education Relations Commission; and

—lastly, allowing collective agreements to be extended to support improved flexibility and stability for all parties, including students and parents.

We have consulted extensively with our partners and incorporated their perspectives into these proposed amendments. Of course, we must acknowledge and respect the fact that some of the proposed amendments will require continued engagement with our partners, but there is no question that each of these amendments, which collectively serve to refine the legislation, are needed to ensure a flexible, transparent and consistent process going forward.

I would like to take a moment to consider the value and the benefit of increased flexibility. A more flexible process is one that can better promote stability and positive labour relations by allowing all parties to be more nimble in their efforts to bargain.

To that end, I would like to talk specifically about the importance of amending the act to permit extensions to existing collective agreements. This amendment, while still premised on robust talks, will allow interested parties to agree to continue the term of operations of collective agreements.

For example, the 2014-17 agreements with Ontario’s teachers and education workers are set to expire this summer. In advance of formal bargaining for contracts, we entered into early discussions with our partners to build upon the gains we made in Ontario’s publicly funded education system and to continue to give students the best educational experience possible.

Our goal in doing so, as is our goal with respect to any collective agreement, was to reach an agreement with our partners that promotes stability in the sector, is consistent with our fiscal plan and achieves positive results for students and those who work in the education system.

To that end, working with our partner trustee associations, we have reached tentative, two-year agreements to extend the 2014-17 collective agreements with the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, ETFO, representing both teachers and education workers; the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, OECTA; the Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE; the Education Workers’ Alliance of Ontario—Alliance des travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation de l’Ontario, EWAO—ATEO; the Ontario Council of Education Workers, OCEW; and the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO, who also reached a tentative new two-year agreement.

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To get here, we engaged with our central partners in extremely collaborative and productive talks that yielded tremendously positive results. If these agreements are ratified and approved by the crown, it will allow all parties to stay focused on what matters most in education: our students. We can continue to build on the gains that we’ve made in Ontario’s publicly funded education system. These gains include the highest graduation rates in our province’s history, strong literacy and reading results, and equipping students in the 21st century with the skills and the knowledge that they need today for tomorrow’s rapidly changing world.

By supporting the amendments I’m proposing today, in particular the amendment to allow for the extension of collective agreements, you will be directly supporting student achievement and well-being for students who are taught and supported every day by Ontario’s teachers and education workers. Together, we are showing Ontario students and their families that those involved in their education remain focused on achieving excellence.

In addition to supporting the tentative extension agreements that have been reached, the proposed amendments will result in an improved process for the next round of formal bargaining.

In closing, I would like to thank all of our education sector partners for their commitment—their strong and unwavering commitment—to Ontario’s children and to building a sector-specific bargaining model that is premised on respect and collaboration.

Labour negotiations have come a long way in Ontario: from a vague process with ill-defined roles for school boards and the crown, to a voluntary process that helped launch a renaissance in our publicly funded schools, to a made-in-Ontario legislative bargaining framework that has proven itself to be a success even in times of restraint. Today, we have an opportunity to continue the positive trajectory of collective bargaining in the education sector by updating the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act with improvements to efficiency, transparency and consistency that will strengthen this groundbreaking legislation for generations to come.

I encourage every member of this House to stand in support of our students and pass the proposed amendments I bring forward to you today.

Madam Speaker and honourable colleagues, I would now like to share my time with my parliamentary assistant, MPP Granville Anderson, who will expand on the importance of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act and the amendments that we are proposing.

We must continue to build on the success that we have achieved with our partners by taking our publicly funded education system from great to excellent.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s a privilege to join my honourable colleague Mitzie Hunter, the Ontario Minister of Education, here this morning in supporting amendments to the School

Boards Collective Bargaining Act. These amendments will, if passed, build on an already successful model for collective bargaining in Ontario's education sector, with enhancements to flexibility, transparency and consistency.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to ask my colleagues in the House, as the minister did earlier, to not only consider the importance of these amendments as refinements to existing legislation, but as necessary tools in the ongoing cultivation of strong, adaptable and enduring labour relations with our partners in the education sector.

This is an essential point, because underlying the success of Ontario's publicly funded education system are two key elements, both of which are intrinsically tied to respectful bargaining that prioritizes mutually beneficial agreements. Those two elements are: partnership in reaching common goals, and sustainable funding that provides the resources and support necessary to make those goals attainable.

To be clear, labour talks are never easy. They never will be, nor have they ever been intended as such. Even an agreement that benefits all parties can only be realized after fulsome, robust talks.

The intent of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act is to give all parties a clearer understanding of their respective roles during negotiations and a defined framework in which bargaining can take place, so that all parties can focus their attention on achieving negotiated agreements that support student success and well-being.

These amendments we are proposing today enhance the flexibility, transparency and consistency of those talks and the agreements they will generate.

Only contracts that are strongly and thoroughly negotiated can lead to mutually beneficial agreements that support enduring, respectful partnerships. As such, any enhancements to an already proven bargaining model serve as enhancements to negotiations and are an important step towards improved labour relations that can reliably balance the needs of the province and trustees with those of unions and teacher federations.

This is what I'm asking my colleagues in the House to support.

This is not a partisan issue. This is an issue that benefits all our kids throughout Ontario in our four publicly funded education systems. Being a trustee, I know how important this is to students and to parents, and to teachers as well. We all want the best for our kids in this province.

Proposed amendments to refine legislation that is essential to reaching mutually beneficial agreements that further our partnerships while being fiscally responsible and sustainable—both of which, I submit, are the premise upon which Ontario's publicly funded education system has become one of the best in the world. We want to keep it as one of the best in the world.

Thanks in large part to our strong partnerships with the sectors, there's no question as to our status as a world leader. Time and time again, international studies have

shown this. Scholars from around the world have visited Ontario to learn from our success—success like our graduation rate. Ontario's high school students are now graduating in record numbers, with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and compete in our global economy. In 2015, the five-year graduation rate surpassed 85%, which is 17 percentage points higher than the 2004 rate of 68%. The percentage of students graduating in four years exceeded 78%, an increase of 22 percentage points since 2004. This means that an additional 190,000 students have graduated who would not have done so had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level.

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Our success is also reflected in test results. In 2003, only 54% of grades 3 and 6 students were achieving at or above the provincial standard in EQAO province-wide assessments. In 2016, overall results show that 71% of grades 3 and 6 students are achieving at or above that standard. This represents a 17-percentage-point increase since 2003.

Looking from the outside in, many studies have shown Ontario to be a leader. We will continue to be a leader, and we want to improve upon that. That's what these proposed amendments will do—exactly that.

The 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, found that Ontario's 15-year-old students are among the top performers compared to all other international jurisdictions. Ontario students continue to perform above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, average in all three PISA domains, which are science, reading and mathematics.

The results of the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, PCAP, 2013 show that Ontario's grade 8 students:

- were the second-highest-performing jurisdiction in science;

- were the only group to perform at or above the Canadian average in our three areas of math, reading and science; and

- were first when it came to reading, the only students to perform above the national average in that area.

Results of the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, PIRLS, show that Ontario's grade 4 students performed near the top in the world in reading achievement—in the world, Madam Speaker. That's a great achievement, and we aim to do better.

Ontario's students have sustained their high level of performance in reading since PIRLS 2001 and have narrowed the gender achievement gap.

There are many reasons for this success, including our strong and constructive relationships with teachers, trustees, school boards, education workers and many others.

Were it not for these partnerships, premised on respectful labour relations, we could not have pursued an agenda of whole-system reform, including establishing clear educational goals, setting ambitious targets and providing support and resources to the system. The results of these reforms are clear.

Full-day kindergarten is now available to four- and five-year-olds all across Ontario. The rollout of this innovative program was the single most significant investment made in Ontario's education system in a generation.

Madam Speaker, that's so true. I have had the opportunity, in both my role as trustee and as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, to visit schools. When I visit grade 1 classes, I hear from grade 1 teachers. One particular teacher has been teaching grade 1 for 40 years, and she said the students that are coming out of our full-day kindergarten far exceed her expectations. They're the best, well-prepared students she has ever had in her 40 years. That's something we all should be proud of, on both sides of this House.

This is what has positioned Ontario as a leader in North America.

As part of our innovative approach to education, we have also focused on better ways of teaching our students the basics of literacy and numeracy, and we have worked to develop their higher-order skills and competencies. As a result, creativity and critical thinking skills are encouraged in all aspects of the curriculum. This means that our partners have been teaching them how to use information to solve problems.

Ontario has also been a trailblazer in offering students opportunities to gain full, real-life, hands-on experience in the workplace. Our co-op program allows high school students to combine classroom and workplace learning. Students gain valuable work experience while earning credits towards their high school diploma.

The groundbreaking Specialist High Skills Major program Minister Hunter mentioned in her remarks lets students focus on a career path that matches their interests and skills while they work towards their diploma.

When we launched the Specialist High Skills Majors back in 2006, 600 students enrolled in the program. This year, approximately 48,000 students are enrolled. High school students can major in one of 19 economic sectors like aviation, information and communications technology, hospitality, energy, the environment and much, much more.

As well, dual credits keep students engaged by allowing them to earn credits that count towards their diploma and towards apprenticeship training and college. Starting this year, high school students are participating in approximately 22,400 dual-credit opportunities at school boards and colleges of applied arts and technology all across Ontario.

All of these innovations have made a clear and positive impact on our education system and our students. But none of these would have been achievable without strong, respectful, constructive labour relations, which again brings me to the importance of passing the proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act as a means to support better bargaining, for brighter futures for our students.

Madam Speaker, you would very well know, as a former school board trustee, how important it is to the

well-being of our school system and our students that, even as we recognize our accomplishments, we remain focused on the future. Being the best today does not mean we will be the best tomorrow. To maintain our position as a world leader and to build on the many successes I have just spoken about, we are working tirelessly with our partners to take our publicly funded education system to the next level. That means living up to the promise of our Renewed Vision and its four goals: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence.

Already, important work is under way, Madam Speaker. This important work will greatly benefit from an improved bargaining process that further clarifies and strengthens our labour relations in the education sector. I would like to take a moment to highlight some of these efforts.

To help us achieve excellence, we continue to keep our focus on math supports for teachers and students through our renewed math strategy. We are dedicating more than \$60 million to implementing this strategy.

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Part of our strategy includes protecting time for teachers in grades 1 to 8 to focus on effective instruction in math. Other key elements of the strategy include up to three math lead teachers in all elementary schools in the province of Ontario and more opportunities for educators to deepen their knowledge in math, teaching and learning, including a dedicated math professional development day.

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven, global economy, students must have a wide range of skills and knowledge to succeed. A strong foundation in math is needed for each of them to reach their full potential. This is also why, as part of Ontario's Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy, the Minister of Education will be leading the implementation of a number of recommendations that include:

- expanding the Specialist High Skills Major programs;
- increasing experiential learning and career development opportunities across this province;
- increasing students' exposure to the science, technology and math fields;
- revising grade 10 career studies courses;
- providing more professional development for teachers with a counselling role; and
- supporting the development of integrated adult education systems.

Of course, developing tomorrow's workforce requires formidable partnerships, including a partnership with our teachers and education workers, among others. It's by working together that we will continue to help students gain the skills they need to get a good job and help ensure our province remains competitive.

Thanks to our collective efforts, Ontario is also a world leader in ensuring equity. For example, we continue to focus on increasing graduation rates and closing achievement gaps for under-represented groups such as

indigenous students, young single parents, and students in the care of our children's aid societies. We do this through innovative programs that address the needs of these vulnerable learners.

To better support our adult learners, we're moving forward with a new Adult Education Strategy. The strategy will promote partnerships among school boards to increase access to a variety of flexible and responsive programs and services that accommodate the diverse needs of today's adult learners.

Earlier this year, we released Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education, a document for province-wide discussions on what "well-being" means. Madam Speaker, I've had the opportunity to visit a number of these presentations throughout the province. They were well attended, and people of all the various sectors of education in our community were well engaged in this process and took an active part in this—whether it's mental health issues, whether it's socio-economic issues around poverty, around making sure our kids are not attending school hungry, making sure we have breakfast programs, or making sure our teachers and our support workers are equipped and their well-being is enhanced, because we need a whole community to make our entire school system better. That's the goal of everyone in this province, and I'm sure everyone in this House would agree that that's something we all have to work hard at, to make sure opportunities are there for our students to succeed.

How can we determine whether we are making progress in promoting well-being? Our extensive engagement process will inform the development of a provincial framework on student and staff well-being. And like so much of what we do, Madam Speaker, the success of this framework will greatly depend on the support and engagement of our partners, something which begins at the bargaining table with respectful talks in a clear and structured environment, which is exactly what the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act achieves and which we are seeking to improve upon with these proposed amendments.

Lastly, with regard to how we are working towards the goal of achieving excellence, we are further enhancing public confidence by securing the fiscal sustainability of our publicly funded education system, which is, as I mentioned earlier, a core element in our success both now and in the future.

Education is one of our most valued public services, and our government strongly believes that every student deserves a safe, modern and healthy learning environment. That is why we are committed to strong, stable, sustainable funding that gives our partners the resources and respect they both need and deserve while taking into account the province's fiscal reality today and tomorrow.

Everything I have laid out today which covers our past successes and the work we're currently engaged in to better support student achievement and well-being is premised on a successful partnership between the government, trustees and school boards, teachers and education

workers. Nowhere is that relationship more profoundly tested than at the bargaining table, which is why the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act is such an important piece of legislation—important, Madam Speaker, but not perfect. There is always room for improvement, especially when the basis for improvement is informed by the diverse perspectives of our bargaining partners.

That is why Minister Hunter and I are so proud to be introducing proposed amendments that reflect the sector's feedback and will, if passed, result in improved flexibility, transparency and consistency. These amendments are necessary refinements that will, among other things:

- make participation in central bargaining mandatory for all education workers' bargaining units;

- update the language in several areas to reflect the crown's partnership with the trustees' associations, including central lockouts;

- require an additional five-day strike or lockout notice before a full withdrawal of services at one or more schools;

- provide clarity with respect to the central terms that would apply to new bargaining units;

- give the crown and trustee associations the right to request local bargaining updates and, if asked, to assist with local bargaining;

- allow the crown or any party to central bargaining to apply to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for a determination on whether there is a conflict or inconsistency between central and local terms;

- enhance the financial transparency and accountability of trustee associations; and

- allow for the extension of collective agreements.

Our government and all of our colleagues in the House understand the importance of labour stability and the fundamental necessity of positive labour relations supported by robust and clear legislation. I'm hopeful that in consideration of those facts and out of respect for how far we have come already to bring labour relations to the point it is today, we will have unanimous support for the proposed amendments we have brought before this House.

I will elaborate a bit further. I was a trustee for 11 years and I took part in collective bargaining back in 2003-04 when it was structurally different, and it was difficult, as a trustee, to grasp and understand all of the issues. It was a framework that just wasn't working.

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So between the unions, teachers' unions and all the unions in the school system and the school board trustee associations, it was decided to come up with another framework, and this was the framework they came up with. This is a framework we're trying to improve on and fine-tune. This is being done for the benefit of our kids. It's not a partisan move by the government. It's something we should all unilaterally support in the best interests of Ontario families and our students.

The five-day notice allows families to make alternative arrangements for their kids. Hopefully, a strike or a

lockout never occurs. That's what we're working towards. That's the perfection we would like to see—and hopefully, this bill does that. That would be great to see as well.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you and every member of the House today for giving these proposed amendments a fair hearing and full consideration. By supporting the proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, members will be supporting the strength of our publicly funded education system. They will be supporting the Renewed Vision for Education and its goals of achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence.

In this way, they'll be supporting students, families and communities, all of whom expect their representatives in the House—no matter what the colour of their lawn sign is, no matter if they are rural, northern, suburban or urban—to support the achievements and well-being of all Ontario students, and to deliver on Ontario's promise of a world-class, publicly funded education system for generations to come. Fulfilling that promise depends on partnership, respect and fiscal sustainability. So let us stand together to build on our success, to expand upon our strengths and support the proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to further debate on this very important matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's always a pleasure to rise and represent the people of Sarnia–Lambton on a bill that's important, on education and how it affects our local schools across the province, but especially in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton.

In saying that, I listened quite closely to both the minister and her parliamentary assistant when they talked about consultations with boards, and with the different federations that are involved, as well. That's one thing I look forward to in this debate this morning and, I'm sure, later this session as we go forward with this bill. I'll be anxious to hear from our critic the member from Whitby–Oshawa, who's spent a lot of time since he's been elected in the role of the education critic, in relationship with our leader; Patrick Brown felt education was important enough that as well as all the other roles as leader, he took it on as one of his main roles.

As I said, I'm looking forward to the consultation, whether it's in this body here or back home in my own riding. I encourage other members to reach out to their ridings, to their members, to their teachers, to their students, to the parents who foot the bill. It is important, as we all know. I've got grandchildren in the system now. My kids are all employed and working, but I have grandchildren still in the system. All my friends do, as well, of course. So I'm certainly interested in the progress and how it will affect each and every one of us and our families as we go forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 92 today.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents in London West, but also in my new role as education critic for the Ontario NDP caucus. I want to respond in a very brief time right now. I'm looking forward to my lead on this legislation, but I want to respond to the comments from the Minister of Education and also the parliamentary assistant and MPP for Durham.

Certainly, many of us in this House had served as trustees, like the member for Durham. I lived through a number of different processes around collective bargaining in this province. I was elected in 2000, so I have seen many iterations of this, but each process was different, and it was very much a work in progress in terms of getting it right.

But one thing I can say—one thing that we saw over those years—is that in many ways, the process is supplemental to the way the people who are sitting around the table treat each other during the process.

The Minister of Education commented that the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act clarified the role of government as funder, and school boards as employers. Yes, that was important, but we also know that the government is the only body, the only partner at the table, with the ability to change the legislative framework in which the bargaining takes place.

What we saw in the aftermath of Bill 122, their last attempt to change that framework, was continuing labour disruption, continuing chaos in our schools. We saw that in the fall of 2015, when the government refused to show the leadership that was necessary to come to the table and to work out a resolution that would benefit the students in our schools, which is what we all want.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Housing and minister responsible for poverty reduction.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm so delighted to be able to speak for a couple of minutes to Bill 92, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

I will say that education, I think, is near and dear to all of our hearts. I know that for myself, having three children, we have enjoyed, in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, some fantastic education over the years.

It's interesting, too, that education really is the reason that I'm here today, because I became activated back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when my wife and I felt that the quality of education—we saw the quality of education in our children's elementary school deteriorating, and became active at that point. It's interesting, how the wheel turns.

We know that the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act came into force in 2014. There was extensive consultation, extensive negotiations. Following that first round of bargaining, our government committed to reviewing the legislation. I think that that is a smart, wise

move on all parties' part, because we need to make sure that we get it right.

The proposed amendments to this act do three things that I think, going back to the reason that I became involved in politics to begin with, continue to promote student achievement and well-being, maintain the public confidence in our publicly funded education system, and continue to foster positive and constructive relations with our partners.

Speaker, I've been very fortunate to have really great relationships with teachers in my riding. I know that going forward, we'll continue to have really good relationships with those teachers, due in part to this type of legislation.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's a great honour to be able to stand and represent the constituents of Niagara West–Glanbrook as I speak to this piece of legislation put forward by the member.

I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Education for her obvious passion and love for students, for parents and for teachers, and also her parliamentary assistant, the member from Durham, for his passion for this issue.

One of the things I did want to mention very briefly is, as my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton mentioned, we need to ensure that there is sufficient consultation. The minister mentioned that they do plan on proactively going out with extensive consultations, and I look forward to seeing what that looks like.

When the member opposite was mentioning that in the late 1990s there were concerns with the direction the education system was going, I thought it was fascinating because, quite frankly, what I'm hearing from people is a similar concern, that they're seeing the quality of education in our province deteriorate under this government, unfortunately.

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So I'm excited to see, perhaps, if this piece of legislation can be proactive in helping parents and helping students move forward. I think that's something we all want to support. We want to make sure that parents have their voices heard; that's something I've spoken about in the past. I want to make sure that students are valued and that they're receiving the highest-quality education that they possibly can.

We live in a great province and we, in the past, have had an excellent education system that turns out some of the best and most productive and happiest people in the world. I'm very proud to be in a province that has that. But I think we do need to make sure we maintain that going forward, and I'm not always confident in this government's ability to do so.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker, and I want to thank all members in this House for participating in the debate this morning on this very important item. I particularly want to thank the member from Sarnia–

Lambton; my new critic for education, the member from London West; the minister responsible for poverty reduction—I know how passionate you are about this; the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook; and, of course, my parliamentary assistant, who is out working so hard on behalf of our students.

The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act amendments proposed through Bill 92 are aimed at ensuring that we can deliver on our goals for education. We're very focused on promoting student achievement and well-being, maintaining public confidence in our publicly funded education system, and continuing to foster and build constructive relationships with our partners.

Our goal with respect to any collective agreement remains promoting stability within the sector so that we can work on all the gains that we've made together with our education partners. We obviously want to be consistent with our fiscal plan, and at the same time, we want to achieve positive results for our students and for our education workers in the system.

I want to use my remaining seconds to really talk about those education workers. A lot of times we talk about teachers, and we know the special relationship that teachers have with their students in the classroom. They're connected to the learning, but there are other education workers who support the school community. When you walk into a school, there's a secretary there and all of the office staff; the principal, the vice-principal; that custodian who keeps that school community bright and clean; and the education assistants in our classrooms, some of them working with our most vulnerable students. I want to say thank you to all of our education partners and our school boards.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the Legislature this morning and speak to Bill 92, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Amendment Act, 2017. I do so in my capacity as the associate critic for education, the official opposition critic for post-secondary education and the chair of the Ontario Progressive Conservative policy advisory committee on education, which is doing great work as we move forward in developing recommendations on education by July 2017.

Many of the members in the Legislature will know that my daughter is an early childhood educator, so this is a topic that is close to my heart.

I say at the outset that I and my caucus colleagues will continue to review and scrutinize this legislation, which the Minister of Education and her parliamentary assistant spoke of with a great degree of passion, as you would anticipate. We've heard from stakeholders, though, who support elements of this bill and others who firmly oppose the amendments being offered by this proposed legislation.

In that vein, we'll continue to reach out to Ontario residents to hear their feedback and listen carefully, as we always do, to their suggestions about any changes that they would like to see in the proposed legislation.

But Speaker, there's no question that the Liberal government's two-tier bargaining system has been a failure, creating chaos for children and parents as a result. In fact, I witnessed the effect of that particular direction in my own riding of Whitby–Oshawa, during the strike in the region of Durham.

During the last general election, this government ran on a platform of labour peace, and yet their policies and two-tier bargaining system have created chaos for students, teachers and support staff. Even the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development has conceded that the process has had its challenges. In saying that, I know the Minister of Education aims to fix some of the challenges within this process. The bill itself clears up any ambiguity about the contract extensions that the Liberal government has been agreeing to over the past several months, by allowing collective agreements to be extended without completely engaging in the collective bargaining process.

Further, employees in the educational worker bargaining units used to be able to voluntarily opt in to central bargaining schemes, but what's clear is that Bill 92 is now making it mandatory. In Bill 92, education workers also have to consistently be represented by the same trade unit throughout the bargaining process, meaning education worker trade unions must now join a council of unions or a bargaining agency if they want a voice at the bargaining table. Central bargaining will only take place with bargaining agencies within the provisions of the proposed legislation.

Once again, as we've seen time and time again, this government is only looking out for the interests of the Ontario Liberal Party. Yet, since the bill has been introduced, some unions—including the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation—have expressed dismay about this bill. CUPE has strongly opposed the proposed legislation, saying the new legislation would take away the rights of school board support workers. The main crux of their concern is the move to legislate all education workers into a central bargaining process which they view as wrong and anti-democratic. The OSSTF, who are still in the process of trying to reach an agreement, have said that their contributions to the consultation process for the legislation have been ignored.

Yet, I do want to say that there are some areas where we see improvements being made in the sector with this bill. For example, the move requiring that the trustees' associations clearly report on the public funds they receive, including salaries for labour relations employees exceeding \$100,000, is a somewhat shocking display of transparency at a time when this government has been bent on removing those who qualify for disclosure. This, of course, is most notably the situation with the removal of Hydro One salaries from public disclosure—which we, as a caucus, continue to call on the government to disclose, especially at a time when they engage in the fire-sale of Hydro One in order to attempt to reach an artificially balanced budget this upcoming year. One

would hope that this shows a change in prevailing attitudes from the members across the way, but I've been advised by some of my seatmates here this morning not to hold my breath.

This bill also ensures that parents are notified further in advance of potential labour disruptions by adding a required additional five days' notice before a strike, in addition to the five already necessary, which is a good idea to help alleviate some of the stress and pain that a labour disruption can have on parents and students.

Speaker, many of these reforms are necessary. It's very clear. I will continue to study many of the other amendments that have been offered in this proposed legislation before deciding which way I'll ultimately vote. But at the end of the day, as we've seen with so many other bills that have come forward recently, it's really too little, too late, isn't it? This government has had 13 years to fix the problems it has created—13 years. Yet we have more scandal, waste and mismanagement than ever before.

Speaker, in closing, I appreciate the opportunity to speak here in this place today on Bill 92, and will undoubtedly have more to say in the coming days and weeks as this bill continues on to committee and, ultimately, third reading debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? Okay. I recognize the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. Going forward, I think one of the key aspects that we wanted to extend our discussion on is the level of consultation that needs to take place on this particular bill. There were some aspects of that reflected in the Auditor General's report, which was referenced earlier in the commentary.

What I have also found in the consultation that I have undertaken within my riding, both with parents' groups and also with community councils, is that they want to be part of the discussion on the directions of this proposed legislation, in all aspects of it, and to become more familiar with the process as it moves ahead. Also, they would like to be able to bring forward their suggestions to shape some of the consultation process that has already taken place and what should be occurring as we move forward.

As I indicated in my comments earlier, the main concern of some of the unions, and particularly CUPE, is that they'd like to move to legislate all education workers into a central marketing process, which they view as anti-democratic. I expect that we'll be hearing more from CUPE and we'll be hearing more from OSSTF on this particular process.

Also, I know that within my particular riding of Whitby–Oshawa, I'll be engaging the trustees within the Durham board of education, as well as the Durham Catholic District School Board, and encouraging them to provide their opinions on this particular piece of legislation, because they have the same concerns that I've just articulated today and they all have a vested interest in the reforms that are necessary.

The bottom line of all of this particular process is making sure that the very best conditions are in place to

support the students across the province of Ontario overall.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing as it's almost 10:15, I will be recessing the House until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Could I have your attention, please? Before we start the introductions, it looks like we have a full House and there are people that have already started standing, so let's go to the process of introducing and no preambles. Let's just get to work, and we'll get these all done.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to introduce all the members who are here from the RNAO, in particular the two people that I had a lovely breakfast with: my friend Una and a young man from Nipissing University, Bradley. I'm not sure where Bradley is, but I know he will be the future of nursing in the province of Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I also want to welcome all of the nurses from RNAO, including Vanessa Burkoski, Aric Rankin, Hilda Swirsky, Wendy Pearson, Michelle Spadoni, Angela Cooper Brathwaite, Alison Reavell-Roy, Amina Alizzi and Araniyaa Varatharajan; and my good friend Paul-André Gauthier. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome Corey Hull to the Legislative Assembly. He joins us here from the town of Minesing in the riding of Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to welcome Lori Jennings and Ashley Pierce from Sarnia-Lambton, here with the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would also like to welcome the RNAO and the representatives that I met this morning: Janet Hunt, Akuah Frempong, Aric Rankin and Sheila Boamah. Thank you, and welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In the members' east gallery today, I would like to introduce a former member, Jim Brownell, who served eight years, from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, and a student who is with him today, Gardner Sage, who is a student at Algonquin College in Ottawa and is the summer curator of the Lost Villages Museum in that area.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to welcome family members of legislative page Nolan Campbell to Queen's Park today. Nolan's grandparents Bob and Betty Campbell and his father, Trent, are here to watch question period.

I would also like to welcome another young man from my riding, Patrick Whitten. He's here with his friend Cole Ryley. Patrick is a great friend and a very smart guy. Welcome, Patrick and Cole.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have three friends from the Windsor area today up with the nurses. They are Crystal

Hepburn, Debbie Kane, and Lynda Monik, who is the administrator of the Sun Parlor Home in Leamington.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy to introduce a guest of one of our page captains, Elizabeth-Anne Campione. Her mother, Rose Campione, I believe is here in the members' gallery today. Welcome.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's my pleasure to introduce guests in the members' gallery from the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association: Sharon Armstrong, Michael Scott and David Hanratty; and also, from Miller Paving, Tom Jones; and from Skelton Brumwell and Associates, Anne Guiot.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm also pleased to welcome the two women I had breakfast with this morning from the RNAO, Maria Rugg and Mary Lynch. Thank you for all you do. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of myself and the member for Mississauga-Erindale, we are pleased to welcome some very good friends here today in the members' east gallery: Junaid Kayani, Moezzam Alvi, Zahra Vaid, Imran Hasan and Shahid Rashdi. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to introduce Debbie Kane, Anita Purdy and Betty Oldershaw from the great riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister responsible for disabilities—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: And government and consumer services. Thank you, Speaker. Good morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That, too.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. It's my pleasure to introduce people from RNAO, Durham Northumberland chapter: Maria Rugg, Beatriz Jackson, Misbah Manesiya and Kathleen Pikaart, and from the Scarborough side, Rhonda Seidman-Carlson. Thank you for having me for breakfast this morning.

I'd also like to introduce a very good friend and constituent, Anela Jadunandan, from Pickering-Scarborough East. She's here for the Islamophobia motion today. Welcome.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very happy to welcome to Queen's Park today an emergency nurse from the Clinton hospital. Thank you to Kristi for making the trek from Huron county.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, watching on TV is an outstanding advocate in our community. Her name is Irene Gabon, who is always looking at our policy and always talking about what we should do next. She's 80 years old on February 25. Happy birthday, Irene.

Mr. Todd Smith: From the Quinte chapter of the RNAO, I'd like to welcome Elizabeth Edwards, Chad Duff and Sue Munro to the Legislature for question period.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's that time of the year again: one of the most anticipated Queen's Park lobby days ever. RNAO is with us today. I'm so pleased and excited to have so many members of the nursing profession here with us in the Legislature today.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd also like to introduce, from my local chapter of RNAO, Jill Staples and Sheena Howard, whom I had breakfast with this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. James J. Bradley: From the Niagara region RNAO: representatives Julie Rubel, Holly Rogers and Gwen French.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Rudy Cuzzetto and the students from St. Luke Catholic elementary school in Mississauga, who are accompanied by Principal Wayne Brunton, Ms. Xenerios, Mrs. Gaglia and Mr. Capasso.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Il y a des représentants de communautés musulmanes de partout en Ontario qui sont ici aujourd'hui.

I am so pleased to welcome representatives from Muslim communities from all over Ontario, in particular the Association of Progressive Muslims, who are here today. I want to welcome them. They are too numerous to mention.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to welcome the nursing contingent from Hamilton. There are several, and two who presented to me were Elizabeth and Carol. Thank you very much. Welcome to Queen's Park, and I hope you have a great day.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have a large delegation from the Muslim community and the seven mosques of Toronto Centre: Emad Hussain, Jamal Hussain, Sureya Ibrahim, Mustak Ahmad, Jakir Hussain, Mohammad Azazul Chowdhury, Mohammad Abdur Razzak, Harun Razzak, Sayed Chowdhury, Khadija Sheku, Mavet Zdyea Mwanawasa, Asad Uddin, Imran Hussain Chowdhury, Jamshed Miskat Chowdhury, Sami Chowdhury, Samsul Muktedir, Mohammad Akther Chowdhury, Fahim Sul-tana Rigi, Nazim Uddin and Ahmad Nawaz Chowdhury.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Larissa Gadsby from Kitchener with the RNAO today, as well as a McMaster medical student. Thanks for meeting me this morning.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would also like to welcome my constituent Janet Hunt from RNAO, who is here this morning along with Akuah Frempong, Aric Rankin and Sheila Boamah.

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Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to welcome to our Legislature all of RNAO, but particularly two nurses from our correctional institutions that I had the great pleasure of having breakfast with: Amber-Lynn Ward Mahoney and Wence Asonganyi—we had a great discussion about corrections and mental health—and also, Shirley Kennedy, who is the president of the Ontario correctional nurses. I would like to welcome them to our Legislature and shout out to all of you for what you do every day.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to welcome Zakyr Rhemtulla, who is from Dunbarton High School in Pickering. Tomorrow, he will be representing York-Simcoe in the model Parliament.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to introduce Brenda Hutton and Morgan Hoffarth from RNAO. Welcome. We are so proud of what you do. Thank you.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce a delightful young man from Oakville. His name is Keith de Silva-Legault. He's here for the model Parliament, from Blakelock high school.

Also, I had a wonderful breakfast today with Louela Rankin from the RNAO. She also is from Oakville. Please welcome her to Queen's Park.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I just wanted to ask everyone to join me in welcoming the grades 5 and 6 students from St. Gregory Catholic School in Etobicoke Centre. They're joined by Jane Pires and Denise Abboud, the teachers, and all the parents from our community. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Soo Wong: I've got a couple of guests who are here today: Rita Palmieri, who is the stepmother of page captain Azaria Inmiss-Zdjelarić; Carol Timmings, the president of RNAO and a good friend—welcome to Queen's Park—as well as Alissa DeJong, a nurse at McMaster Hospital.

To all my colleagues who are here today: Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to ask you all to help me give a warm welcome to some amazing members from Halton. Here today are Ibrahim Daniyal, Mohammad Sultan Qureshi, Sohail Naseer, Fawd Malik and Faisal Elahi. Please welcome them to Queen's Park. Welcome.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm happy to introduce two constituents: Doris Grinspun, CEO of RNAO, and her director of communications, Marion Zych. Also, my good friend Shamsh Kara is here with Progressive Muslims. It's great to see you all.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Please join me in welcoming the CEO of RNAO, Doris Grinspun, a long-standing friend of mine, and all of the RNAO representatives here today. Thank you.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: [*Inaudible*] Shaheen Butt, a councillor with the city of Pickering and a representative from the Pickering Islamic Centre as well. Welcome, Councillor Butt.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to welcome to Queen's Park this morning, from Thunder Bay and the RNAO—a great breakfast this morning—Carine Gallagher and—I apologize, but I forget your first name—Nurse Edwards, from the third-floor surgical unit at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to introduce Rebecca Harbridge, an RNAO member from Barrie.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: May I join you in welcoming anybody else in the room that hasn't already been named and welcomed to Queen's Park? Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That used to be my line a long time ago.

The government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to wish happy birthday to my chief of staff, Dave Phillips.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank all of the members for setting a record for the nicest and most impressive filibuster I've ever been a part of.

I, too, have some introductions. First and foremost, I'd like to introduce and thank the members from the riding of Brant for being here for nurses day. I appreciate our conversation.

I would also like to introduce a former member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry in the 38th and 39th Parliaments, former MPP Jim Brownell. Thank you for joining us, Jim.

Also with us today is a former member from Simcoe Centre in the 36th, and Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford in the 37th and 38th, and uncle to the opposition leader: Joe Tascona—and former Deputy Speaker.

I thank all members for their introductions, and I thank and welcome everyone here. It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Ontario's health care administration is already bloated to new heights. Will the Premier scrap her plan to hire 84 new vice-presidents to oversee the LHINs? Yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, let me add my words of welcome to everyone who is here today. I want to just say that, in my remarks to RNAO this morning, I thanked them for being such a good partner in the development and the evolution of health care in this province, Mr. Speaker. They have provided guidance, they have provided advice and they have been practical partners as we have evolved the role of nurses in the system and as we have worked to change the relationship, particularly in primary care.

There is a transformation of health care going on in this province. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition isn't supportive of that. I guess he thinks that the status quo is where we should remain. The status quo can always be improved. We can always do better, and that's exactly what our Minister of Health is working to do, with organizations like RNAO.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. We already heard from the Auditor General that administration is reaching new heights: 39% on home care. We are taking precious funds away from front-line care. This hiring of these new executive vice-presidents—executive paper-pushers—is happening under the veil of secrecy.

The growth of administration, I repeat, is taking away precious funds from front-line care. The Liberals have already taken the Ministry of Health from five associate deputy ministers to 20. We don't need more executive

bureaucrats. We need more money on the front lines. To put this into context, Mr. Speaker, one of these associate deputy ministers has the same value of 5,000 home care visits. There's a real cost to this bloated administration.

When will the Premier put patients first, not more VPs, in health care? It's about patients. It's about RNs. It's about doctors. Support front-line care.

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Leader of the Opposition can say whatever he would like to. The reality is, there are no new 84 vice-president positions being created. In fact, by merging the CCACs and the LHINs, if he took the time to actually read the materials and understand the policies, we are decreasing the number of management positions by 59. In fact, we are guaranteeing, as a result of a decrease in management positions and a decrease in administrative costs, a savings of 8%—financially guaranteed. That translates into more than \$10 million that will be reinvested into front-line care, into home and community care, into other important resources that people need.

Mr. Speaker, he's just plain wrong when he suggests that somehow there's a—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to request that the talking over your own minister stop.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Can you believe that?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the rebuttals from the other side. Stay nice today.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'll conclude, Mr. Speaker, by just imploring the Leader of the Opposition to stick to the facts. The facts are 59 fewer managers and 8% savings financially. We're investing all of that into front—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If I wait this long again, I'm going to warnings.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier. The Minister of Health is splitting hairs. Whether it's LHINs or sub-LHINs, there are 84 new vice-presidents being hired in these new sub-LHINs—more bureaucracy. They can criticize anyone who doesn't agree with them. They criticized the Auditor General when the Auditor General pointed out we now spend 39% on administration in home care. Frankly, you're here welcoming RNAO, and RNAO has already criticized this plan to create 84 new sub-LHINs. Are you going to attack RNAO? Are you going to attack the Auditor General?

1050

There are patients out there who aren't getting care in Ontario. Our hospitals are struggling, and the government just has more spin and more talking points. When is this government going to put patients first? That's the real question.

Interjections.

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

Mr. John Yakubski: A novel idea for the Liberals: patients first.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The thin ice just cracked.

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, what we're not going to do. We're not going to fire 100,000 front-line workers or anyone in the health care sector. We're not, like that government did, going to fire 10,000 front-line nurses in this province. What we're not going to do is make decisions to close dozens of hospitals.

In fact, we inherited a bureaucracy in the Ministry of Health when we came into power that had more than 6,000 employees. Today in the Ministry of Health, we have 3,053 employees. CIHI estimates our overhead, our administrative costs at 5.6%. The Leader of the Opposition himself said that the gold standard for administrative costs is between 5% and 6%. We've hit that gold standard. I can't understand what he could possibly complain about.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: I'd like to thank the RNAO for joining us here today. They are amazing and tireless advocates for patients. But what I want to flag here is that Ontario has the lowest RN-to-population ratio in the country. The government can say whatever spin they want, but I repeat: Ontario has the lowest RN-to-population ratio in Canada.

This government has let patients down. They have let RNAO down. Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier: How do you justify having the lowest RN-to-population ratio in the country? And please don't have someone else justify this; I'd like an answer from the Premier on this embarrassing statistic for Ontario.

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm so proud of what this government has done since we took office in 2003. I think our record demonstrates our commitment—right up to the present day—to nurses, the 140,000 nurses who are employed in this province. That's 26,000 more nurses, including 11,000 registered nurses, who have begun work in Ontario since we took office in 2003. In fact, the number of nurses employed in this province has increased every single year consecutively, for the 12th consecutive year. This is a clear and consistent trend line.

More than 64% of those nurses are in full-time positions. We need to continue to increase that number. We're proud of our record, unlike the record of the party opposite, whose record was to refer to them as hula hoops—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Since the Premier does not want to answer on why we have the lowest RN-to-population ratio in Canada, let me try something else. Maybe we can get the Premier on the record.

The city of Ottawa recently closed a specialized unit in one of its long-term-care homes. The unit gave extra care to seniors with dementia. It was a dedicated unit for seniors who needed the highest level of health care. The program was meant to be funded entirely by the province, but the funding did not keep up with costs. Now the unit is closed.

Why did the Liberals allow this unit, which they previously funded, to close? Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Why did you allow these seniors in Ottawa to be abandoned?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's one of my privileges as Minister of Health to oversee our province's more than 600 long-term-care homes. That is a responsibility that I take very, very seriously. I'm proud to say that this government takes that responsibility very seriously as well.

We acknowledge and recognize that the acuity, the complexity of residents—and they are residents because this is their home—that the acuity and the complexity of those individuals is increasing as they age, as we're seeing a higher prevalence of dementia in our long-term-care homes as well. We need to modify our approach to be able to adapt to those changing realities.

That's why, in last year's budget, we invested an additional \$10 million for behavioural supports for precisely those same types of residents who need that extra specialized care so they can manage in their lives.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon, come to order, please.

Final supplementary, the member from Nepean-Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Premier: Last month, I hosted a lunch-and-learn on dementia with the Ottawa-Renfrew Alzheimer society, and they told me that there's a high growth of dementia in the city of Ottawa.

As you can appreciate, this unit was very important. At the same time, at the same long-term-care home where an 88-year-old resident was suffocated and where another senior was charged with murder but was found unfit to stand trial because of dementia, the unit was saving lives, and the growth is going to continue for the need. But when the long-term-care home turned to the local LHIN to help keep the unit open, they were told there was nothing to be had.

Speaker, this is a callous disregard for those seniors struggling with dementia in the city of Ottawa. How could the Liberals allow this unit to close, and will they reopen it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I referred to in my previous response as well, we're seeing a higher incidence and prevalence of dementia, indeed, around the world, let alone in Ontario and in Canada. It's important that we put in place the supports that seniors and others with dementias face, including Alzheimer's. It's one of the great challenges, I think, of our time.

But we are making those important investments. We have provided \$31 million in funding to the Alzheimer Society. We, as I mentioned, have increased the level of support for behavioural supports across this province—where we have mobile, as well as stationary, behavioural support teams of nurses and other associated professionals.

We are developing a province-wide dementia strategy, and I'm glad to see that the member opposite is participating in that exercise. It will allow us to have a uniform and strong approach to provide that support.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Since the Liberals came to power in 2003, how much money have people and businesses paid to private and foreign companies in Ontario's hydro system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: In relation to that question, we have invested heavily in rebuilding our system. One of the things that we have done is to ensure that we have a reliable system and a clean system. Putting that on the burdens of affordability, we want to make sure that we can make it as affordable as possible for ratepayers. We had to spend \$50 billion in generation and transmission. We cleaned up our system and made it reliable, and we know there has been a cost to ratepayers on this and that has been significant, and that's why we're acting.

When it comes to generation, we have hundreds of companies in this province that are doing a great job of ensuring that we have a reliable system, one that we can count on and one that we know is clean and green and reliable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the Conservatives say the high cost of hydro is green energy, not private ownership. The Liberals say it was replacing coal with private gas plants and privatized wind power, and not private ownership.

What neither the Conservatives or the Liberals will talk about is that people and businesses aren't paying for the cost of power, Speaker. They're paying for power plus guaranteed profits for private and foreign companies, now and for years and years to come.

1100

Can the Premier tell Ontarians how much privatized energy is costing them on every bill?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The one thing that the third party is not looking at is, for example, our nuclear generation, something that we should be proud of in this province. The Candu reactors are being sold around the world, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in this province, Mr. Speaker. The refurbishment of Darlington and the refurbishment of Bruce are going to continue to see our GDP grow and grow.

They're creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in this province. The investments that we're seeing—like great companies, for example, in Cambridge: BWXT. I was in Port Hope with Cameco. There are jobs from Ottawa to Windsor to northern Ontario that are happening because this government invested in Ontario companies to ensure that we have generation that is going to give power that is clean and reliable, something we should be proud of.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplement—ary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does the Premier believe that it's in the public interest for our transmission system, which is a monopoly with no competition, to be controlled by private interests for the benefit of shareholders, or would she agree that something as important as the electricity grid should be managed by the public in the public interest, in the interest of Ontarians?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, if I can continue talking about the importance of what we're seeing in the generation, in the transmission of companies that we have here in Ontario that are creating thousands and thousands of jobs—that's something that we all know will benefit our overall economy and our overall GDP.

When we have companies that are investing in Ontario and making sure that we're creating jobs in wind, in solar and in biomass, that is something that we should be proud of, especially when I talk about companies, again, like Laker in Burlington—fantastic work that's happening out at Laker. They're creating work and jobs. They're expanding their business. They started with 75 employees; they're now up to 150. And you know what? They're going to expand again.

That's because this government recognized the importance of investing in generation, investing in a system that is clean and reliable—something we can all be proud of—but at the same time, creating jobs in every part of this province.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier is promising to reduce hydro rates by taking money from health care, education and transit. Does the Premier understand why that makes people cynical?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have committed to reducing the costs that people are paying on electricity. In fact, the leader of the third party has been talking about this for some time. I know she understands that the 8% reduction on people's bills this month was a part of that, but I know she also understands that that's not enough, that there's more we need to do.

She also needs to know that we will continue to invest more in education, more in health care. I point to the free tuition for post-secondary that starts this September.

Students who are living on a low income will have free, or better-than-free, tuition. That's an increased support for people; that's an increased support for our education system. I know the leader of the third party would support that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For nearly 14 years as an MPP, cabinet minister and Premier, this Premier has driven up hydro bills. She's ignored the people of Ontario. Now, with an election on the horizon, she claims to suddenly get it.

But as Libby Keenan—you remember Libby Keenan, the farmer from Essex who she met at Queen's Park—wrote in an open letter, “Your political ambitions have run amuck and your priorities have little to do with the people you were elected to serve.”

Does the Premier understand, Speaker, how frustrated people are with the hydro crisis that this Liberal government has created in our province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to meet with Libby, and I have spoken to many people across the province about their concerns on electricity prices. That's exactly why we began some time ago to reduce electricity costs, to take costs out of the system, to put in place programs like the Ontario energy support program for people living on low income, the 8% that came into play in January that people will see on their bills. That's part of the strategy. But there's more that we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, my political ambition has been to make life better for people in this province, to make sure that education, health care, a clean, renewable electricity grid, infrastructure, support for people in their lives today, and strong economic growth into the future—that's my political ambition, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this week, people saw that the Liberal government will pass legislation to stop hydro disconnections, but only if they got the credit. The Liberals will make promises to lower bills, but only if they see a political benefit. The Premier thinks hydro costs are unacceptable, but only after 14 years of making things worse, making those bills unacceptable.

Can the Premier explain why people's problems don't really seem to matter at all until they become political problems for the Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have been working for some time to take costs out of the system. Long before the leader of the third party was going on this subject day after day, we were already renegotiating the Samsung deal; making a decision not to build new nuclear, which was in the order of a \$15-billion saving—that's a cost that will not be put into the electricity system—making sure that there was a low-income support program in place; and taking the provincial portion of the HST off people's bills.

I recognize that this is a concern of people across the province. That is why, before the budget, we will bring

out further measures to help people with their electricity bills.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. We know that yesterday the Liberals received the provincial Teddy waste award for their luxury car subsidy. It happens to be a subsidy that gives \$14,000 cheques for buying \$100,000 Tesla cars.

But just a few years ago—here's a quote from the Premier: “If anybody's paying that amount of money for a car, they probably don't need a \$5,000 rebate....”

Apparently, Speaker, what she meant was that \$5,000 wasn't enough for her Liberal friends.

Why are luxury car owners being given \$14,000 cheques from Ontario taxpayers? And, Premier, why the sudden U-turn?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Of course, I want to begin by thanking the member opposite for the question and for him expressing, I would say, belated interest in what is a very successful program that our government put forward, starting a number of years ago.

I'm not completely sure that members of the Legislature are aware of all of the details that are contained in this program that's been growing, with respect to its subscription or its popularity, over the last number of months and years.

Speaker, just to be really clear about this, back in 2010, this government launched our first electric vehicle incentive program. To date, this program has provided Ontarians with incentives to help purchase close to 7,400 electric vehicles and approximately 1,900 home and workplace chargers. On average, of course, some electric vehicles can cost up to 85% more, compared to equivalent conventional gas-powered vehicles.

The list goes on with respect to the progress this program has made. I would be happy to provide additional information to that member and members of the House in the follow-up question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, back to the Premier: The government announced the changes to the \$14,000 Tesla luxury car subsidy on February 1. According to his LinkedIn profile, Iain Myrans, Minister Murray's former chief of staff, started working for Tesla in February.

1110

Was this just a coincidence? When was the decision made? How was the decision made? This certainly doesn't pass the smell test, Speaker.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up question. There are a whole host of reasons that our government is making significant investments that run the full gamut of helping to ensure—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There are 14,000 good reasons.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, come to order. Thank you. We're now in warnings.

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Speaker, as I was saying, there are a whole host of very positive reasons that we are making a wide range of investments to ensure that—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You shut down a dementia unit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin–Caledon is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —to make sure that the transportation sector, which currently accounts for 35% of the greenhouse gas emissions that are produced in the province of Ontario, is reduced. It's why we're investing in transportation solutions to lower those amounts right across the province.

But the other really important thing that the member from Leeds–Grenville misses is that these are the kinds of programs that are helping to feed the innovation and the job creation in the leading sectors in our economy. That's why we're working hard to—

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

The member from Timmins–James Bay, new question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, hydro prices is a real issue for real people. It is not an abstract thing. There are citizens across this province, and businesses across this province, who are being hurt. I want to give you but one story.

In Kapuskasing live Monsieur and Madame Oliva Sylvain. They have to heat with wood because there's no natural gas where they live. They're off the grid. They use electricity only as a backup to wood if the wood fire was to go out. They are there all the time.

They used to pay about \$275 a month for their electricity bill, but it started to go up some years ago, so they decided to take your advice and that of your ministers and to do everything they could to reduce their electricity bill by reducing consumption. They have taken stuff offline. They have bought all of the LED lights they can get. They've done everything they're able to in order to reduce their hydro bill, but yet it went up. This month, they got their hydro bill and it's 375 bucks.

How can anybody have confidence in your government when they do what you say they are to do and yet their bill still goes up?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I thank the member for the question and for explaining the situation that many families in northern Ontario are facing.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that those in the north and in rural areas are seeing their bills go up, and that's why we're going to take more action. We did come forward with the RRRP reduction of \$60 that they are seeing on their bills.

The one thing that it is important to recognize when it comes to conservation programs is that they do work. They do work in the sense that when we conserve energy—if every household continues to save energy, to conserve energy—we don't need to build more generation. And if we don't need to build more generation, we can keep our costs on a downward rate. That's what we're going to continue to do.

But in that instance—I don't know the full story about the couple from Kapuskasing, but I do recognize that in the north and in rural parts of Ontario, we can do more and we will do more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, it doesn't work for Oliva. He has done everything, along with his wife, that they can do to reduce consumption. They're doing what you asked, but their bill still goes up. This is why people are so frustrated. It's not just the fact that they pay more; it's the question that they do everything to save, and yet it still goes up.

Why don't you admit that your entire hydro policy is a failure and that what we really need to do is to find a solution to reduce their hydro bills and stop talking about it and do something to help Monsieur and Madame Sylvain?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I wonder, when they were in power and they cancelled the conservation programs, if that actually helps the families. We had to reinstitute them. We had to rebuild the entire system, and that comes with a cost.

For all families in Ontario, the one thing that we've done is we phased out coal. That has actually helped every family in this province. By phasing out coal, we've saved \$4.3 billion in our health care system. We're seeing a 23% reduction in air pollution deaths and a 41% reduction in air pollution hospitalizations.

We've built a system that people can rely on. We no longer see rolling brownouts or blackouts. But we know we can do more. We want to see more conservation, we want to see a stronger grid, and we'll make sure that we find ways of helping that family in Kapuskasing and all families around the province.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. As this government considers pay increase proposals for Metrolinx executives, we see more examples of how the Liberals' transit agency can't get anything right. The latest is a \$770-million 182-train disputed contract with Bombardier that, after years of delay, has devolved into a war of words and legal threats.

Now, it's no secret that some of the projects where the Liberals had planned to send the 182 light-rail vehicles have fallen off the rails, leading some to wonder if Metrolinx is trying to sneak out and avoid paying for these trains they ordered. Those suspicions grew when we learned that Bombardier has had a test vehicle ready for inspection since October. The media saw it yesterday,

yet Metrolinx refuses to inspect after filing for contract termination.

Premier, it's a mess. Can you explain what the heck is going on here?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: You know, it's always remarkable to me to hear the member from Kitchener-Conestoga—frankly, any member from the Conservative ranks—stand up and talk about challenges that might be faced in the transportation and transit realm. Everybody in this Legislature, everybody watching at home and everybody across the province knows that literally year after year, month after month, decade after decade that party has had no plan to invest in transit. It's had no plan to put forward initiatives that would suggest that we'd ever be able to transform GO, that we would build LRTs.

We all know the story, but it bears repeating. It's important for people to be reminded of the fact that they killed and filled the Eglinton subway project the last time they were in power; that literally every single year, every single provincial budget I have seen since I became a member of provincial Parliament, which has contained unprecedented amounts for transit and transportation, has been rejected by that member, by their leader, by this party, and yet they have the audacity to ask a question on this particular topic—

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

Mr. Michael Harris: Yet he has the audacity not to answer the question that I actually asked.

It was this Liberal government that negotiated the terms of the contract, and now we're going to foot the bill for their mismanagement, not just for the delays running right through the entire \$770-million deal, but now for legal proceedings and a potential new tendering process for a replacement. Meantime, Bombardier claims everything is on track for the 2021 delivery.

Everything this government's transit planners at Metrolinx set their sights on runs off the rails, with the cost going directly, of course, to the taxpayers—UP Express, upside-down bridge trusses and now LRV trains. The people of Ontario aren't asking for much here. They just want their trains that they paid for.

Will the Premier tell us when we will get our LRVs and how many millions more we will have to actually pay for them?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the follow-up.

Listen, on this side of the House, this Premier and our government—here's what we're doing in transit. We are standing up for the people of Waterloo region. We are investing to make sure the ION LRT is delivered on time. We're standing up for the people of the GTHA. We're building GO regional express rail. We're building LRTs along Hurontario, in Hamilton, along Eglinton with the Crosstown, and along Finch West with the Finch West LRT. We are literally building transit. We're expanding into Niagara, we're expanding into Bowmanville. We are building transit every single day of the week.

The challenge I have with that question is, it sounds to me like it was written by Bombardier. We're here on the side of the people of Ontario to build transit, to deliver the positive outcomes. We're going to continue to focus on that. I would encourage that member to get onside with the people of his own community and help us deliver the outcomes they're expecting.

Interjections.

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

A very soft reminder that I've already said the warnings are on, and if you don't think I'm going to, then let's find out.

New question.

1120

MINIMUM WAGE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Nurses—many of them are here with us—devote their lives to providing great care. That care is based on needs, not on ability to pay. Nurses are strong advocates for the determinants of health. They know that better incomes mean better health. That's why nurses, like New Democrats, support a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. So why is the Premier refusing to support a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, when all of the nurses are telling her it's the right thing to do?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Labour is going to want to comment on our strategy around minimum wage and the work that we have done in that area. But I wanted to say to the member opposite that this morning, when I spoke to RNAO, I made that exact point: that they have been partners in guiding us in health care, in the evolution of the health care system, but they have also been strong, strong advocates in advocating for strong determinants of health.

They understand very well that housing, child care, decent wage and lack of precarious work—that all of those things feed into healthy outcomes. We appreciate their advocacy. We appreciate working with them on the health care issues, but also on those important social justice issues as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Every day, nurses see the impact of poverty and low wages on their patients' health. Poverty is the number one determinant of health in Ontario. People cannot live healthy lives when they cannot afford nutritious food, when they're working two or three part-time, low-paying jobs but still can't make ends meet.

Under this government, nearly one in 10 workers is taking home a minimum wage that leaves them on the edge of poverty or below. We have to raise the minimum wage to improve the health of the most vulnerable workers of this province.

When will this Premier start listening to all of the nurses that came here today, and many more, that are

here to tell you and finally support a \$15 minimum wage in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I would like to thank the member for that question.

You've got a government on this side of the House that I think has been working very, very hard to make sure that minimum wage is tied to the rate of inflation.

Between 1996 and 2003, the minimum wage was frozen at \$6.85. Since taking office in 2003, we have raised that nine times—nine times since 2003. We've made those changes based on the advice of a group we got together. We had poverty advocates. We had organized labour. We had business. They wanted predictability and they wanted to make sure—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker.

When we held those hearings, a lot of people came to the table—a lot of advice from the people of Ontario, a lot of advice from business, organized labour. Who didn't we get advice from? Who made absolutely no submission to that panel? The New Democratic Party.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

LUTTE CONTRE LE RACISME

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Ma question est pour la ministre de la citoyenneté et immigration.

Madame la Ministre, j'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer de nombreux membres de la communauté musulmane dans mon comté d'Ottawa-Vanier. Ils ont soulevé avec moi leurs préoccupations à l'endroit de divers incidents de discrimination à leur égard.

Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of Ontarians believe in an open and inclusive society. However, we have observed recently that our province is not immune to displays of Islamophobia in our neighbourhoods.

Can the minister inform this House what the government is doing to address systemic racism, including Islamophobia across the province?

Hon. Laura Albanese: I want to thank the member from Ottawa-Vanier for this important question.

I know that MPPs have been meeting with Muslim community leaders across our province. I want to say that there is no room in Ontario for racism and there is no room in Ontario for Islamophobia. Ontario must and will lead the way in building a society where all people can live free from fear, from racism, from hate speech and from violence.

Our ministry has directly challenged Islamophobia by funding a public education awareness campaign called breakthebehaviour.ca through the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. Our province, from its earliest days, has been built on immigration, and our province is committed to building a society where all people of all backgrounds live free of fear.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Merci à la ministre pour sa réponse. La diversité est une caractéristique importante de l'Ontario.

Our province is home to approximately 61% of the total people of Muslim faith in Canada. Over the years, the Muslim community has contributed significantly to the richness of Ontario's cultural fabric, economic growth and humanitarian initiatives.

However, the devastating tragedy in Quebec City has awakened fear. Speaker, can the minister share what the government is doing to ensure that Ontarians of Muslim faith feel welcome and safe in this province?

Hon. Laura Albanese: Once again, I want to thank the member for the question. I want to reiterate that our government does not tolerate any form of racism or discrimination against any group.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight that later this afternoon the member from Ottawa-Vanier will bring forward an important motion for debate. As you know, and as we heard yesterday, the Premier has appointed Minister Michael Coteau as the minister responsible for anti-racism. We heard yesterday from the minister that he has held 10 public meetings across Ontario. He has heard stories and spoke about the devastating impacts of systemic racism. We also heard that we're bringing forward a provincial plan very soon to address systemic racism.

We are strongly committed to addressing systemic racism and believe that all Ontarians deserve to feel safe and included.

Interjections.

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

New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Premier. Ryckman Farms is a quail farm in Chatham-Kent that was once expanding but is now struggling to keep up with the cost of doing business in Ontario. In November, in their hydro bill, their electricity usage was \$590. However, the total bill came to a ridiculous \$5,900 thanks to a delivery charge of nearly \$1,800 and a massive global adjustment fee of over \$2,700. That's not an adjustment, Speaker; that's highway robbery. His bill was 10 times his electricity usage.

Scot and Cheryl Ryckman are doing what they can to survive. Your government, Premier, isn't doing enough.

To the Premier: How can Ryckman Farms and all Ontario businesses account for such outrageous extra fees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thanks for the question, because it is important for us to talk about the investments that we had to make after the system that they left us was in a mess. Those farms wouldn't have been around. Many businesses wouldn't have been around if we were to continue to have rolling brownouts and blackouts. It's catastrophic for a business—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is warned. Anyone else? Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's catastrophic for a business when it can't even turn the lights on. We invested in the system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron–Bruce is warned. And if I sit down and it happens again, I'll get the next person.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that there are some businesses out there, along with families and other ratepayers, that are having a hard time with those types of bills. So we invested in building a system and we've also invested in putting forward programs that will help many of these businesses. If they're large enough, they qualify for the ICI program, the IEI program, the Demand Response Program and many others. If they're part of the retail price plan, they've got an 8% reduction, and the saveONenergy program is helping businesses like that and many others.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Premier. Pat Cottrell and Peter Knipfel are small business operators and they are hurting under this Liberal government's failed energy policies. They're finding it harder and harder to stay in business. In 2011, the cost for electricity was \$8,000 per year. Today, at \$37,000 a year in hydro bills, Pat's seasonal family campground won't be able to stay in business. It's unaffordable.

And with Peter's hydro bills at \$119,100 a year, 120% higher than in 2003, how long can his store keep absorbing the costs of Liberal mistakes, mismanagement and ideology?

To make matters worse, the Wynne Liberals have slapped a \$2-billion cap-and-trade tax on Ontarians struggling to make ends meet.

The Premier says she is listening. However, her policies and ideals are forcing businesses to either shut down or move out of Ontario.

Why should anyone trust the Liberals' energy plan any more today than the past four years under her leadership?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: As the Minister of Energy indicated, that very business will be getting 8% off their energy bill as a small business, which actually is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: At the same time, the member is dead wrong when he says that Ontario is uncompetitive when it comes to business. Just look at what we've done on the tax side. The capital tax saved by businesses is \$2.3 billion a year. Our corporate tax rate is saving

businesses \$2.5 billion a year. Even the Leader of the Opposition, yesterday, in Mississauga had this to say: "We have an advantage right now with our corporate taxation rate."

Maybe the member ought to connect with his leader; for a change, he was reading out of the facts part of the library instead of the fiction part. It was good to see. It's a first, and we're very pleased that the Leader of the Opposition is actually using facts in the Legislature for a change.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. For months, hospitals in Windsor have been bursting at the seams. Patients who already face long wait times are waiting even longer. Some are even being admitted without a bed. Hospitals are forced to choose between performing surgery and admitting a patient. The state of health care in Windsor has truly reached a tipping point.

Will the Premier admit that years of chronic underfunding and frozen budgets have put families at risk?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Perhaps I can begin by thanking our hospital workers—our nurses, our physicians, all of those who work in the hospitals—because it has been a difficult flu season. There have been a number of capacity issues because the outbreak of flu this winter season was worse than it was last year. Fortunately, of course, the flu vaccine was an almost exact match to the flu we have seen. But that did bring some specific and time-limited problems and challenges to our hospitals including—if the member opposite has listened to the hospital leadership itself, they will attribute a lot of what they saw to the flu outbreak itself, including in the Windsor region.

It's important that Ontarians understand that not only do the vast majority of the more than 150 hospitals in the province exist far below that 100% capacity, but the investments that we're making are making a fundamental difference in terms of them addressing those challenges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I actually called the minister's office about the crisis with the outbreak of the flu at our hospitals and what I was told was that, tough luck, the cupboard is bare. The doctors and nurses you just applauded will just have to make do.

It's the same answer we got when over 150 registered nurses in Windsor received pink slips.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Beaches–East York is warned. I had a choice.

Finish, please.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker.

Again to the Premier: Hospitals should be equipped to deal with an influx of patients during flu season, yet this government's chronic underfunding leaves hospitals and health care workers scrambling to fill the gaps.

Emergency department wait times in Ontario have reached their highest point in nine years. In Windsor, at least 20 surgeries have been cancelled because hospitals simply do not have enough resources.

Will the Premier finally admit that her government has let patients down and commit to providing enough funding to allow our hospitals to meet the needs of our community?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I don't want to attribute everything to the flu, but it's important to understand that for Windsor hospitals—as of December 31, 2016, the Windsor hospital metro site was at 84% capacity, the Maryvale site—is that correct? It says “Mary Valley” here—was at 68% and the Ouellette site was at 94%.

The 3% increase in hospital funding that we announced as part of last year's budget, and, last fall, that nearly-half-a-billion dollars, makes a big difference. What doesn't make a difference is if we follow what the NDP did by closing 24% of all of the acute hospitals in the province and 13% of the mental health beds. I know every single one of my 25 staff well, and everybody in this Legislature knows they would never respond to an inquiry like that.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Education. As a mom of two young boys, I know that good schools become great schools when parents are engaged in their children's learning. Research shows a positive link between parent engagement and student achievement and well-being. The greater the support that families provide for their children's learning and educational progress, the more likely their children will do well in school and continue in their education.

I understand that, as of this morning, the Parents Reaching Out Grants applications are now open for the 2017-18 school year. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you tell us more about the importance of this program and what this means for our students?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Davenport for her question and for always speaking out on behalf of her schools in her riding.

This program is important, because research shows a positive link between parent engagement and student achievement and well-being. That is why we want to make it easier for more parents across the province to participate in their child's learning and well-being inside and outside of the classroom.

The Parents Reaching Out Grants—or the PRO Grants—are supporting projects across the province that help parents tackle these everyday challenges, and it gives them an opportunity to be more involved in their child's learning and in their school community.

We've made these grants available to school councils, parent involvement committees and not-for-profit organizations working with parents to help remove barriers to parents getting involved in their child's learning. I am

pleased that today the grants are now open for applications.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Minister. I'm pleased to hear that we are enabling local solutions to enhance parent engagement in support of the achievements and well-being of students.

I couldn't agree with you more when you talk about the need to make it easier for more parents across the province to support their children's learning and well-being inside and outside the classroom.

Through past projects, students and parents in my riding of Davenport have had access to funding for these special projects. One project that comes to mind was put forward by the Toronto Catholic District School Board's St. Rita Catholic School—actually my very own old elementary school—where sessions were organized for parents to support their children's math skills.

Minister, can you please tell us more about what our government is doing to enhance parent engagement and support of children's learning and well-being?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you again to the member from Davenport.

Being a parent can present overwhelming demands at times, whether it's helping with math homework, encouraging our children to pick up a book and read or just worrying about online safety. That's why, since 2006, the government has awarded over 19,500 PRO Grants to school councils and 799 regional/provincial grants, a total investment of nearly \$31 million.

Some examples of projects include family math night for parents and students to work together through math activities and learn more about the math curriculum, and workshops for parents to learn more about cyberbullying awareness and prevention to ensure we keep our students safe when they're online.

1140

Today's news is proof to Ontarians that for our youngest learners and their parents, the adults involved in their lives and in their education are working together and are focused on their path to success. I encourage all members of the House to share this news with their communities.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, my question is simple. Craft brewers and wineries are taxed through a graduated per-litre tax rate which allows lower taxes for smaller producers. Craft distillers, on the other hand, are penalized by much higher rates of taxation. In fact, their tax rate is 10 times the rate that the wine industry enjoys for sales at their own on-site vineyard shops.

Minister, why are craft distillers not taxed the same as craft brewers and wineries in our province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. The member may know that we have been in deliberations with the craft distillers over some time. They recognize

that we've increased their margins from 39% to 45% as we proceed forward with the changes we made in the recent fall economic statement. We are continuing to do even more, but it's critical to note that even members of the craft distillery industry have welcomed the changes that we've made and are encouraged by the steps that we're taking going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Minister, I don't know who you're listening to, because we've all had meetings with craft distillers across the province. Steve Clark, the member for Leeds–Grenville, is meeting with the association on behalf of our caucus regularly, and they're very disappointed with your new tax rules.

Beattie's Distillers in my own riding has a potato vodka distillery. Their choice now—and watch this, folks—is they can either pay a 139.7% markup to the LCBO to sell their product or a 61.5% sales tax recently added by your government. Those are the highest taxes in the entire nation.

BC allows the first 50,000 litres to be sold tax-free, with no provincial tax. That's what they're looking for, a model after the BC model. If BC can do it and support BC farmers and BC products, why can't we do the same in Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Again, these seem to be alternative facts that are coming from the opposition. I'll tell you why—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to caution us against using any of those catchphrases that we're adopting from some other place. Let's just keep things on the parliamentary level, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to remind the member opposite of the facts. The facts are that we reduced the overall tax rate for craft distilleries in the last go-round and we are looking at graduation, going forward, similar to what we've done with the wine industry, for example. Those discussions are on right now. They've always recognized that we were proceeding in that form.

We also recognize that the grain industry and the agri-food business are reliant on spirits, as well. That impact on our economy is tremendous. That's why we're working closely with the industry. Furthermore, the craft distillers who got involved were involved under an old tax regime that was higher, which they recognized to be the case. We've made it better.

We know we can do more, and that's exactly what we're doing.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Health. More than 10 years ago, my constituent Travis

Bailey was mistaken for someone else and was shot in the head. As a result, he has a severe brain injury.

CCAC has been cutting his care and has never been able to meet his complex needs. Instead, he found a private provider with staff trained to work with brain-injured patients, and he has been using his criminal injury compensation to pay for it. That money will run out in a few days—money he should never have had to use for services in the first place.

How can the minister allow an innocent victim of extreme violence to suffer in this way?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. I can't begin to imagine the challenges that this individual has faced through no fault of his own—not that that should matter. It is a tragic case.

Not having all the details, I can't and shouldn't speak to the specifics, but I am certainly more than willing—enthusiastic, in fact—to discuss this particular individual with the member opposite to see if there might be something that can be done.

At the foundation of this is that we rely on and expect our CCACs, through objective assessment of the needs of any individual, to provide the level of care that they can according to the situation, and I would anticipate that that is being done in this case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Miss Monique Taylor: Just so the minister knows, I have been working with his office for over a year on this file and it's still outstanding.

Speaker, in a response to a question I asked a couple of years ago about acquired brain injury, the Minister of Health at the time, now the Chair of Cabinet, said, "We are transforming health care.... If services can be provided in the community, then they should receive those services in the community."

I would like to know: Did the minister at that time forget to mention that services in the community would be private and that people would have to pay for it?

Will the current minister step in, make sure that Travis Bailey is reimbursed, and ensure that he gets the care he needs from this point forward?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I do know that my staff have been working with the office of the member opposite for some time on this. Certainly, it isn't necessarily or always straightforward. I would hope that the member understands that I would want to do whatever we could under this and other circumstances, but we need to follow a process, a process that is uniform for all Ontarians across this province. I am, of course, as I mentioned in the first part of the question, more than willing to have a conversation with the member opposite and to see if in this specific case there might be something else that can be done.

NURSES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Our government is proud to have stood alongside nurses since 2003. We recognize

the contributions of nurses in the Ontario health care system. In my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, we have incredible contributions by our nurses. Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting nurses in RNAO Region 7, and I want to thank each one of you for what you do every day within Ontario but, more importantly, to champion for causes that matter to your patients every day. Whether it is no-smoking bylaws, childhood obesity or helmet safety, that's what you do. Thank you for being a champion.

Today is RNAO day here at Queen's Park, and I'm so excited for each one of my colleagues who is joining us here today.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please speak about the invaluable work our nurses provide to Ontarians every day?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I too want to thank the more than 140,000 nurses in this province, many of whom are with us here today, and—perhaps this is a good way to end—it doesn't matter whether you are an ER nurse working in Clinton, Ontario; it doesn't matter if you're a nurse practitioner working in a long-term-care home or providing that essential home care to a frail, elderly individual in their home, or working in our correctional facilities. There are more than 100,000 nurses that each and every day go to work to make a difference in the lives of others. I can't imagine what we would do with even a single one less. The commitment that they make, the compassion that they demonstrate, the difference that they make in this province each and every day needs to be championed and applauded. I thank them for that work and will continue to work with them to improve the situation that they work under, each and every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Ms. Laurie Scott: This past Tuesday, we welcomed Daughters of the Vote, delegates from Equal Voice, to Queen's Park to celebrate women's leadership in politics. One hundred and twenty-one inspiring young women from across the province, including Jillian Hawley from Haliburton in my riding, joined us to observe question period and to learn about our work in the Legislature. As you know, the Daughters of the Vote initiative is especially significant because this year we are celebrating 100 years of women gaining the right to vote in Ontario. This is a crucial milestone in the history of democracy in our province.

The voices and votes of women have shaped this province from the very beginning, and we should celebrate their achievements each and every day. For ex-

ample, exactly 73 years ago today, we saw the swearing-in of the first woman elected to the Ontario Legislature, Agnes Macphail. Since 1917, we have made incredible strides when it comes to the representation of female voices in Ontario. By celebrating the achievements of women, we pay tribute to their role in building our province and country while reminding ourselves of the important work still to be done.

That is why I am pleased to inform my colleagues that the Progressive Conservative caucus will be marking important moments for Ontario women throughout the year by way of a social media campaign. Be sure to keep an eye out on Twitter @LaurieScottPC and Facebook as we share important milestones and celebrate the women trailblazers of Ontario politics.

QUEBEC MOSQUE SHOOTING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today to pay my respects to Canada's Muslim community over the horrific mass shooting at the Centre culturel islamique de Québec on January 29, 2017. On that tragic day, six Canadians were killed in a shooting rampage that saw 19 others injured. Today, I want to name their names not just to be recorded in the transcript but also, importantly, to be remembered.

Khaled Belkacemi was a professor at Université Laval in their agriculture and food sciences department.

Azzeddine Soufiane was a local who was shot in the chest because he ran to the gunman.

Boubaker Thabti was a husband, a father of two children and a native of Tunisia.

Abdelkrim Hassane was a father of three and a native of Algeria who worked as a computer programmer for the Quebec government.

Mamadou Tanou Barry was a native of Guinea.

Ibrahima Barry was a father of four and was also from Guinea.

On behalf of the entire New Democratic caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I offer our deepest sympathies and support to the families and friends in our Muslim community. Please know that you are not alone; we stand with you now and always.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm here today to remind us all of how critically important it is for us to support all the important work that has to be done in mental health, especially for our young people.

I was there last week with Minister Hoskins when he announced \$140 million in mental health programs for young people. It has three parts to it. It invests in new youth-centred hubs for young people 12 to 25, it invests in supportive housing, and it also invests in psychotherapy. It tries to get people away from the psych wards. You know, 15-year-olds in a psych ward is a pretty awful place. We've got to get them off the heavy pharmaceuticals. They need drop-in centres to go to. That's why

I am so thrilled, too, that the minister is aware of the incredible work that Stella's Place does down the street on Spadina, where young people come from all over the province who have nowhere to go, but they go to Stella's Place, which is run by Donna Green, a philanthropist, because her daughter went through that hell.

These are the kinds of investments we need to make in our young people, in our mental health, that you don't see. It never makes the newspapers, it never makes CP24, but it's important to invest in the mental health of our young people.

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: February 14 was congenital heart day. On this day, we acknowledge the 250,000 or more Canadians born with congenital heart disease, or CHD.

CHD refers to the condition where a baby's heart or blood vessels around the heart were not formed properly. In Canada, one in every 100 babies is born with CHD. It's actually the number one birth defect that we know of today.

Years ago, a CHD diagnosis meant that children had a 20% chance of reaching adulthood. Today, over 90% of CHD children live into adulthood due to major advances in medical care.

I'm pleased that Newborn Screening Ontario is working to implement screening for CHD. The additional screening which is to occur in the winter of 2017 is expected to allow for early detection and improve outcomes for 50 to 100 babies a year. But more needs to be done.

I'd like to recognize the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance as the only not-for-profit organization that supports all Canadians with congenital heart disease. Dedicated volunteers work closely with both adult and pediatric medical professionals and patients from coast to coast to support and raise awareness of congenital heart disease and the need for lifelong specialized care. I salute the wonderful volunteers and supporters of the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to rise and talk about the hydro crisis, and I want to ask, who is it hurting in the province of Ontario? It is hurting seniors, young families, young people, manufacturers, business owners small and large.

We know that the CEO of Hydro One is making \$4.3 million a year. Think about that. Then he says he feels our pain. Can you imagine somebody making \$4 million a year and he feels the pain of families and manufacturers in the province of Ontario?

If you take a look at Manitoba, which is publicly funded, publicly owned, he's making \$400,000 a year. It's still a lot of money, but one-tenth of what they are making in the province of Ontario.

And then I say to the Premier, who also says she feels our pain, you have an obligation in the province of

Ontario to make sure that hydro is affordable. That's your job. And it's been affordable here for over 100 years.

Manufacturers in my riding and right across Ontario are leaving. We're losing good-paying jobs in Ontario because of Hydro One. So I'm saying—

Hon. Reza Moridi: Not true.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It is absolutely true.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's absolutely true, and it's unfortunate that that side of the House doesn't understand that what the people in this gallery up here are feeling, they are feeling in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not used to having to deal with heckling during statements—just a comment. Also, I would like to remind our audiences that participating in this place is not permitted, so no applause, no protests, nothing. Please refrain from doing so.

LUMINA BOREALIS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: In my riding of Kingston and the Islands, families have arrived from far and wide to take in the sights of Lumina Borealis, a beautifully crafted night tour featuring gorgeous lights and displays held at our community's historic Fort Henry.

I'd like to formally recognize the wonderful team at St. Lawrence Parks Commission and the creative minds of Moment Factory who have worked together to create a magical evening. Lumina Borealis is a delight for young and old. With an anticipated \$6 million in revenue and over 55,000 tickets sold, Lumina Borealis showcases our community's thriving tourism industry. My own visit this past December was visually entrancing, and to see this historical site through an entirely new lens was nothing short of extraordinary.

1310

My sincere thanks to everyone involved in putting together such an engaging attraction. Darren Dalglish and his team at the St. Lawrence Parks Commission are known throughout the province for events like Fort Fright, Pumpkinferno and A Light at Night in Upper Canada Village, all of which are well worth the trip to eastern Ontario. Darren is a true visionary, and he has created outstanding events in unique spaces.

I encourage all members of the House to come and visit Kingston and the Islands. Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.

CHARLES MANN

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I would like to take a few moments today to recognize Charles Mann. Charlie passed away in his 95th year with his family at his side.

Charlie's life was truly remarkable, as proven by his commitment to community, family and country. In 1942, he volunteered for the First Special Service Force, or, as they're better known, the Devil's Brigade, and served in

the Second World War in Italy, southern France and North Africa.

His services earned him a number of distinctions over the years, including an award for operational excellence from the Canadian government. I was proud to be there when he received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. He also received the US Congressional Gold Medal.

In 1946, he married his wife, June, and made their family whole with their children, Melodee and Marten. In 1964, Charlie and his family moved to Kincardine and called it home, where he also served as one of Canada's first nuclear operators at Bruce Power.

His commitment to his new home and community would lead him into municipal politics for 27 years, during 13 of which he served as mayor of Kincardine. In his later years, he volunteered with the local Legion and the Kincardine Scottish Pipe Band.

I particularly found it touching at his memorial service that family members of the Devil's Brigade travelled to Kincardine to pay their respects as well. Clearly, that incredible bond transcends generations of family members. His granddaughter shared an amazing tribute as well. It was an incredible spirit that will not be forgotten.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: On February 11, MPP Baker and I hosted our annual government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall in Etobicoke. This annual event offers our constituents an opportunity to learn more about the multiple services offered by the province of Ontario and also by the various agencies and community organizations in both Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre.

I was pleased to see an extraordinarily high attendance this year as residents visited more than 110 exhibitors from various government ministries, institutions, local agencies and community groups. All of the organizations in attendance did a fantastic job of connecting with residents and sharing the resources and services that they offer.

For me, the fair is an invaluable time to connect with hundreds of local residents, examine the displays, and answer lots and lots of questions. From the very enjoyable hands-on experience of meeting young service dogs in training from the Lions Foundation to meeting local youth from the Etobicoke-Lakeshore SEYA group, there is always something for me and for my constituents to experience and learn at this event.

All of the organizations at the fair worked very hard to get their much-needed information out to the community. Of course, nothing would have been possible without our volunteers, who so generously offered their time. I want to thank our great volunteers, community organizations and residents who came out and made the fair a great success.

ENGINEERING AWARDS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very thrilled to rise today and tell everybody all about the wonderful 2017 winter certificate presentation and awards dinner gala that took place last weekend. It was the Professional Engineers Ontario, York region chapter. They always put on great events with great recipients. It's very exciting to see all of the new grads and their families there as well.

I want to highlight a couple of people. One is Shehandeh Ehtemam. She goes by "Hannah." She's very petite. I hope she doesn't mind that I mentioned how petite she is; she's my height. She's very passionate. She just got onto the board of the York region chapter of Professional Engineers. She has gone to events with me. This past summer, we went to the Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre, and we had a fantastic visit there. I really recommend it to people.

I want to give a shout-out as well to the winners of the Engineering Project of the Year. They were the Mircom Group of Companies, the Toronto Transit Commission and also Drystill Holdings, which has developed a new way to distill water without using a lot of energy, which of course we're very interested in hearing about.

There was an address from the Professional Engineers Ontario's president, George Comrie, as well as an address from the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers' director, Helen Wojcinski. Congratulations to all the organizers, the recipients and all the winners.

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

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 35 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 35 be waived. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including chiropodists, nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, registered practical nurses, health promoters, occupational therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, mental health and social workers, physician assistants, managers and administration;

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

I will affix my signature and send it to the table with Benjamin.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “Hydro One Not for Sale! Say No to Privatization.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their” daily “lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

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

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

I sign this petition, Speaker, and give it to page McGowan to deliver.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition for amending the vacant unit rebate on commercial property taxes in the province of Ontario.

“Whereas the vacant unit rebate on property taxes is widely acknowledged as contributing to the high number of empty neighbourhood retail storefronts ... and reduced economic activity in our community; and

“Whereas the vacant unit rebate precludes short-term and flexible leases, which have been proven to revitalize neighbourhood commercial strips by providing a more accessible entry point and fostering entrepreneurship; and
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“Whereas the vacant unit rebate is widely acknowledged as a contributor to the lack of interest or necessity among landlords in lowering commercial lease rates and/or improving commercial properties; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto, in the course of public hearings in 2015, formally requested the province of Ontario amend the vacant unit rebate provision ‘for commercial and industrial properties, in order to enable the city to establish graduated vacant unit rebates that will induce and incent owners and tenants to meet eligibility criteria that align with the city’s economic growth and job creation objectives’; and

“Whereas there are millions of dollars in property tax revenue being lost that could help alleviate problems of homelessness, food security and other local issues; and

“Whereas the decision to amend or end the vacant unit rebate in our community ultimately requires the province of Ontario to amend the City of Toronto Act;

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

“That the province of Ontario amend the City of Toronto Act, granting the city of Toronto the power to delineate a specific category for neighbourhood retail commercial properties, and allowing them to set, amend and/or eliminate the vacant unit tax rebate for this category.”

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

SOINS DE SANTÉ PRIMAIRES

M^{me} Gila Martow: J’ai une pétition à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario.

« Attendu que le gouvernement de l’Ontario doit renforcer les soins primaires comme le fondement du système de santé afin d’accomplir les objets transformatifs du projet Priorité aux patients; et

« Attendu que les recherches démontrent que la collaboration interprofessionnelle en soins primaires offre de meilleurs résultats pour la santé des personnes et un meilleur rapport qualité-prix; et

« Attendu qu’un investissement dans les soins primaires aidera à relever les défis associés au recrutement et à la rétention et consolider les équipes travaillant en collaboration interprofessionnelle pour la livraison des services de soins de santé primaires de haute qualité, axés sur la personne; et

« Attendu que plus de 7 500 personnes employées dans plus de 400 centres de santé communautaire, équipes de santé familiale, centres d’accès aux services

de santé pour les autochtones et cliniques dirigées par du personnel infirmier praticien sont rémunérées à des taux inférieurs aux recommandations formulées en 2012, et, par conséquent, font face à des obstacles dans le recrutement et la rétention des fournisseurs de services de santé, ci-inclus le personnel infirmier praticien, les diététistes, les infirmières autorisées, les promoteurs en santé et les gestionnaires;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de s'engager à investir dans les équipes de collaboration interprofessionnelle en soins de santé primaires le montant de 130 millions de dollars annualisé au cours des deux prochaines années pour soutenir l'efficacité du recrutement et de la rétention en soins primaires. »

Je vais la signer et la donner au page Jack. Merci.

HOME CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition called "Pass Dan's Law Now," and I would like to thank Suzanne Acton from my riding for signing the petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Canadians returning to or setting up residence in Ontario for the first time after residing in another province must wait three months for access to care, including end-of-life care, at home or in a community setting;

"Whereas the majority of Canadians die in hospital while two thirds would rather die in their home;

"Whereas Dan's Law would remove the waiting period for end-of-life home and community care as well as home care more generally for Canadians returning home or coming to Ontario for the first time after residing in other provinces or territories;

"Whereas passing Dan's Law would allow people at the end of life to be with their families, at home in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Home Care and Community Services Amendment Act," also titled Dan's Law.

I fully support it, since it's my bill, and I will sign it and give it to page McGowan.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas payday loans are the most expensive source of credit in Canada and can create the risk of an additional financial burden for the 3% of Ontario households that borrow payday loans; and

"Whereas in Ontario a two-week payday loan carries an annualized interest rate of approximately 547.5%; and

"Whereas these loans are typically marketed to financially vulnerable consumers;

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

"Mandate the Ontario government incrementally reduce the cost of borrowing a payday loan, first to \$18 per \$100 advanced in 2017 and then to \$15 per \$100 advanced in 2018."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and send it down with page Konstantina.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario has the highest electricity rates in all of North America, and the provincial government has recognized an oversupply now exists at the exorbitant cost to taxpayers;

"Whereas reports of wind farm construction causing source water contamination of the underlying contact aquifer in the former Dover township of Chatham-Kent municipality reported to the Ontario Ministry of Energy in 2012;

"Whereas a proper investigation of the nature of the contamination and the cause of the contamination in the source water under the former Dover township of the Chatham-Kent municipality has not been conducted by the MOECC;

"Whereas a proper subsequent investigation by a qualified toxicologist to determine if a risk to population health exists from the source water contamination under the former Dover township in the municipality of Chatham-Kent has not been conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Health;

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

"To immediately halt the construction of North Kent 1 and Otter Creek wind farms until proper investigation by the MOECC and the Ontario Ministry of Health are completed and proper remediation plans are then put in place to protect source water resources and prevent well interference in the municipality of Chatham-Kent."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Connor.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

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

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

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

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

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

I sign this petition and give it to page Nolan to deliver.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I bring forward a petition to reduce energy rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office; and

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount; and

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

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"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

I'm pleased to add my name to this petition. I support it and will give it to page Luca, who's also from my riding.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: This petition is of great interest since I spent part of my lunch hour on the picket line out here with the striking cafeteria workers from the University of Toronto. It's called, "Fight for \$15 and Fairness.

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

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

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario's labour and employment laws:

"—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker's age, job or sector of employment;

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

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

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

"—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

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

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

"—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

"—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

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

"—ensure all workers are paid at least \$15 an hour."

I fully support it. I'll sign it and send it up to the front with Anellah.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

LUTTE CONTRE LE RACISME

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of

Ontario should reaffirm that diversity has always played an important part in Ontario's culture and heritage; recognize the significant contributions Muslims have made, and continue to make, to Ontario's cultural and social fabric and prosperity; stand against all forms of hatred, hostility, prejudice, racism and intolerance; rebuke the notable growing tide of anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiments; denounce hate attacks, threats of violence and hate crimes against people of the Muslim faith; condemn all forms of Islamophobia and reaffirm its support for government's efforts, through the Anti-Racism Directorate, to address and prevent systemic racism across government policy, programs and services, and increase anti-racism education and awareness, including Islamophobia, in all parts of the province.

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

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Merci, madame la Présidente. J'ai déposé cette motion le 1^{er} décembre 2016 suite à des incidents dans mon comté et pour contrer les discours haineux à l'égard de la communauté musulmane qui prévalaient un peu partout.

During my career at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, I had the opportunity to see the effect of injustice on people. As a law dean and past president of the Law Commission of Canada, I always wanted to make sure that the law conformed to values of equality.

Madame la Présidente, je voudrais répéter ici l'essence de la motion en français. Elle affirme que l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario doit réaffirmer que la diversité a toujours joué un rôle important dans la culture et le patrimoine de l'Ontario et que l'on veut s'opposer et dénoncer les attaques de haine, les menaces de violence et les crimes haineux contre les personnes de la foi musulmane. On veut condamner toutes les formes d'islamophobie et réaffirmer l'appui aux efforts du gouvernement qui sont faits pour contrer le racisme.

Discrimination undermines the human dignity of people who are subject to it, but it also diminishes us all. Discrimination can be internalized. It can stop people from seeing themselves as full citizens and from achieving what they are meant to achieve. Discrimination is perverse because it also diminishes the people who engage in it. It prevents them from seeing the potential of other human beings, of hiring them, of welcoming them, of befriending them and it has profound effects on our society.

We suffer economic loss when people do not achieve their full potential. When injustices go unremedied, it attacks the moral fibre of a society, particularly a society like Ontario, which believes in the rule of law.

Discrimination can spread, it is contagious, and we know why discrimination spreads. It spreads because of indifference and because of the silence of others. History has shown us that when we do not stand against hatred and discrimination, we are implicitly condoning it. We are accepting it as a fact of life, and that's wrong.

We owe it to ourselves and to Ontario to reaffirm our commitment to the equality of all before and under the law, to strengthen our engagement against discrimination. This is the purpose of this motion. It is not about curtailing free speech. Indeed, it is an act of speech to denounce discrimination. It is not about singling out a particular religion or a group. It is about standing up, and standing up against all forms of discrimination. In this House, we have stood up against incidents of anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. Just this week, the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation denounced the anti-Semitic gestures in his riding. I have done the same on the night of my election and will continue to do the same. We should stand up against all forms of discrimination. All forms are wrong.

But currently, the Muslim community is the target of hatred. The tragedy in Quebec City is the most horrific example. Six men lost their lives in a place of worship. There are also incidents in Ontario. We are not immune from hatred in Ontario. In my riding, I have met women who were harassed because they were wearing the hijab. Young women described being pushed, spat at, discredited, told to go back where they belong. People were refused employment. There were graffiti on mosques and on schools teaching Islam. After the tragedy in Quebec, some Muslim parents were afraid to send their children to school.

This motion is about reaching out to the Muslim community, which is targeted because of international events and discourse elsewhere in the world over which they have no control. Innocent men who were praying were gunned down because of their faith and we must stand to extend our compassion to the families and friends and to the entire community.

Syed Rizvi today told me, "The voices of hatred are loud. We need the voices of reason to speak together to be louder." This is what this motion wants to achieve.

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The Muslim community is extending its arms. I know that there is a group of central Toronto mosques that is opening its doors on Canada Day this year, July 1, to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary. They are opening their doors to strangers and friends to offer food and friendship to celebrate the tenets of peace, hope and friendship that are the foundation of Islam. We would like to invite all Ontarians to attend. I'm very pleased that this is happening.

I want to say that this motion for me represents a statement of which I am very proud. I draw a lot from the community that has accompanied me throughout this journey. I stand here because I believe in the rule of law. That has been my commitment throughout my career. This commitment, this motion, is about words because a stand against discrimination matters. It must be spoken.

Il faut trouver les mots pour dire les injustices. Il ne faut pas avoir peur d'utiliser les mots justes pour décrier ce qui ce passe.

This commitment is also about action. It's about supporting and directing the Anti-Racism Directorate's

action and strategy because it commits ourselves to continue to address discrimination in all its forms, all throughout the services that are offered. It commits us to eradicating discrimination in education, in policing, in all the ways in which we can find it.

This is not about singling out a religion; it is about extending our compassion to a community that hurts. It is also to stand, like Ontarians, for equality for all. It's not the time to be indifferent. Let's not be indifferent; let's not be silent. Merci.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm proud to rise in support of this motion today condemning Islamophobia. Simply put, all forms of hate and discrimination against people of any faith, including Muslims, is wrong. Hate is hate.

This is a serious problem that must be addressed head-on. We have seen too many acts of hatred and violence against our friends in the Muslim community. Recently, the world watched in horror and Canadians across the country grieved as we saw that horrible mass shooting in the Quebec Islamic cultural centre, where six Canadians of Muslim faith were killed and 19 were injured. In May, a university student from Iran suffered a concussion after being punched repeatedly and told to go back to his country—how sickening. In 2015, there was a fire-bombing of a mosque in Peterborough that was declared a hate crime. For all these troubling incidents, there are, unfortunately, others that go unreported.

All this is completely unacceptable. That's not Ontario. That's not Canada. As public servants, we must condemn these acts. The Constitution Act of 1982 guarantees that everyone has the freedom of conscience and religion. It is not simply a Canadian value; it is a fundamental human right. People should be free to worship without fear of violence or persecution.

We will not be divided by those who preach hate. Our values will always be stronger than the spirit that seeks to divide our home and pit community against community, neighbour against neighbour, family against family, citizens against citizens. Here in Canada, we don't tolerate this division. We celebrate our unity. We celebrate our multiculturalism. That's the beautiful story of Canada.

We recognize that one of our greatest sources of strength is our pluralism; that no matter the colour of your skin, which part of the world you come from, what language you speak, whether you attend a mosque on Friday, a synagogue on Saturday or a church on Sunday, every distinct element of who we are as a people comes together to form this beautiful mosaic that is Canada.

Our country is made up—one description was—of people who have been on the wrong side of history. That includes United Empire Loyalists, refugees from the American Revolution; the Irish, who fled famine; slaves who followed the North Star to freedom; Chinese workers willing to work for a dollar a day; Jews who survived the Holocaust; eastern Europeans who escaped the yoke of communism; the Vietnamese boat people who escaped

the horrors of war; and many, many others. That's part of our national fabric. We are a nation of many backgrounds brought together to take a chance of finding that dream of Canada together, that dream of freedom and opportunities for everyone regardless of your faith.

On a more personal note: When I read about the motion from the member from Ottawa–Vanier, it was without reservation that I wanted to support it, because this Islamophobia is real, and we have to condemn it unreservedly.

When that horrible terrorist attack happened, the hate crime in Quebec city, my immediate reaction was to want to go visit some of my friends of the Muslim faith. In the south end of Barrie, there's a gathering where the Muslim community meets in Barrie. I went to go hug friends. I have a friend, Tahir Nawaz, who's a taxi driver in Barrie, who came from Pakistan to Canada. I went to give him a hug, and I said, "You're surrounded by friends. Don't let anyone who preaches hate leave you with the impression that anyone in Canada condones that. We will always denounce hate." I think of Tahir when we see these hate crimes, but I think, there is a wonderful man who has his boys in Barrie—I've played ball hockey with them on the street. Why should his boys, growing up in Barrie, ever have to fear that hate? We must denounce that hate.

I think of a physician, Dr. Abdu Sharkawy, who's a physician in Mississauga, a friend who faced a hate crime this past week in his home. I called him to say the same thing: that you are surrounded by friends, that our country and our province unreservedly look at those cowards who preach hate and we denounce it, and will never, ever tolerate that.

I think of my good friend Adam Ibrahim in Windsor, who sent me a note. He told me his wife had trouble sleeping when this happened because she was scared, as someone being of Muslim faith. Adam sent me a nice note. In his email he said that she wasn't as scared when she saw the responses of everyone, the fact that across the board everyone was condemning this hate, that in our Legislature there was no issue or contention, that everyone in this Legislature condemns it without reservation. That gave hope, that gave a sense of optimism to his wife, and it made me think that I am proud of our Legislature today. I am proud of Queen's Park.

I support this motion as a moment to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Muslim community, to say we stand with you against this hate. I say to the member from Ottawa–Vanier that I stand with you, together, in declaring that this Legislature unequivocally opposes Islamophobia.

Mr. Speaker, the great thing about Ontario is that it doesn't matter whom you love, what you look like, where you worship—you are welcome here. You are welcome in our incredible province of Ontario.

It was an honour to speak in favour of this motion, and I look forward to voting for it later today.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Es salaam aleikom.

It's my privilege to stand here before you to speak to this motion and, first off, to congratulate the member for Ottawa–Vanier for bringing it forward to the Legislature. Not so long ago in my riding of Hamilton, someone attempted, unsuccessfully, to burn down a mosque. Hijab-wearing Muslim women across the province feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods, fearful that they will be the next victim of the heinous attacks that we've seen in too many Ontario communities.

On January 29, Canadians were shocked to learn of a vicious, hate-motivated attack at a Quebec mosque, leading to the death of six men in a place of worship. At a time when we've seen a rise in Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism and hate crimes against Muslims in Ontario, when public figures like MP Iqra Khalid find themselves subject to vicious, ongoing attacks based on hate and fear, it is clear to me that we must take action. We have to do more to tackle ignorance and prejudice, and we have to do that work together. That's why New Democrats worked hard to ensure the creation of the Anti-Racism Directorate, and I congratulate the government for putting in place that body here in Ontario. That's why, this past October, New Democrats put forward a bill to declare October Islamic Heritage Month across Ontario, and were proud that all parties were part of that initiative.

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We have to tell the real stories and celebrate the many, many contributions that countless Muslims have been making for decades in communities across Ontario. We need to do everything possible to ensure that Ontario is a province where anybody and everyone can build a good life, a province where Muslim children know and feel that they belong, a province where people of every faith and every background live without discrimination and without fear, a province where no one is denied opportunity because of who they are or how they pray. We need to continue to fight Islamophobia in whatever form it may take.

As a New Democrat and as an Ontarian, I'm proud of the work that we've done in the past to fight intolerance and injustice, but I know that we need to do more. As I said, I'm very glad that this motion is before the Legislature today so that we can all make it clear in no uncertain terms that Islamophobia is not welcome in Ontario and that we will stand together. We will stand together, as Ontarians—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—to battle intolerance, ignorance, discrimination, hate and violence.

Remarks in Arabic.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Bonjour. Boozhoo. Aanii. Es salaam aleikom.

It is a great honour to be able to speak today. I was just saying to the MPP for Etobicoke North that I am going to do my best to get through this without weeping, and I say that because, in 2017, it is my heartfelt wish

that we did not have to have a motion of this nature in this House. I commend the member for Ottawa–Vanier for bringing it forward. She has fought for social justice all her working life. Before, she fought for social justice.

In my life experience, the reality that we have not, as a society, as a world, learned that hate leads to more hate, that we still have to teach each other over and over and over again that it is only love that is going to defeat hate, that we have to keep doing that pains me, but we have to keep doing it. So it is an honour to be able to stand today and to do just that: to stand up and to say we don't accept this. In this place that we call home, in Ontario, in Canada, we believe in and we've lived the experience of difference leading to more understanding, of difference leading to love, not to hate. The human capacity that we develop by understanding each other better because we are different is what we have to show to the world. That's the model that we have to show to the world.

Islamophobia is a reality. It's a reality around the world. But it is the latest in a series of discriminatory belief systems that we have to stand up against. That's why the Anti-Racism Directorate is so important. I'm glad that it is supported by everyone in this House. We have much work to do to break down those barriers between people. But I truly believe that because, apart from our indigenous people in this country, we all came from somewhere else. Because of that, we are positioned to actually be able to articulate what it is about understanding difference that is so important in the human experience. So it's an honour to stand here.

I'm just going to briefly talk about my personal experience. When I decided to run for the Ontario Legislature in 2002 and got ready to run for a nomination in 2003, there were many voices that said, "You cannot run in Don Valley West. You're a woman; you're a lesbian; you cannot win in Don Valley West. You have to move. You have to move somewhere where—I don't know—there are different people who are going to be more accepting." One of the arguments that was made to me was that when you go into Thorncliffe Park or you go into Flemingdon Park and you knock on the doors of people who come from a different background, a different culture, they are not going to accept you. And I said, "I don't believe that." I don't believe that.

I want to say this to this House today that there are people in the gallery today who have been with me every step of the way since I started in 2002, and they are of the Muslim faith. They are members of the mosque in Thorncliffe. They are people from Don Valley West who, when I stood at their door, we talked about our differences and we talked about what it meant for us to work together and how what was more important was that we shared values around our children, around our families and around the health and the education of our community. That's what binds us together. It is those commonalities that make it possible for us to create this country, to create this province.

That's why it enrages me that we still have to have this conversation globally. We have a hugely important

role to play. I want to thank everyone who is here today. You are part of that conversation. Thank you to the member for Ottawa–Vanier, but more importantly, thank you to everyone who joins with us to say, “Enough.” We do not believe that hatred leads to anything good. It is love that is going to get us there. And inshallah, we will not have to have this conversation again.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: All that is required for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing. I started the day in the aftermath of the Quebec mosque shooting contacting the two mosques in Nepean and the synagogue in Barrhaven. I told them that they should not live in fear for worshipping God, and it was a message that I delivered at their pulpits for 11 years. I felt so hollow that my words were just only that.

As a Christian, I have never had to fear going to church, although I know that is not a luxury elsewhere in the world. I wanted, today and then, to reaffirm the Canadian value and freedom of religion.

Hate is hate. Hate of all kinds needs to be condemned. Today’s motion by Nathalie Des Rosiers is actually just a simple matter of process in the assembly, by decent people. It should receive unanimous support, and I expect that it will. We would not tolerate hate or racism against any group in Ontario, so why would we not now? Or why would we add a caveat to tolerance?

Islamophobia is real, and we know it. It is anti-Muslim hatred and bigotry, and it cost the lives of six peace-loving men in Quebec City. Some argue over semantics or definitions; I won’t. I flatly reject any loophole where racism is tolerated in any shape or form. I’ve seen it done, and I’ve seen it by all sides of the political spectrum. I want to caution people on the right who want to inflame this, and I would caution people on the left who want to inflame this.

As legislators, it is our duty to lead our communities through debates of humanity, inclusion and tolerance. On March 20, I will do that with my multi-faith leaders in Nepean and with other organizations as well to celebrate our diversity and to stamp out hatred. I am pleased that Imam Delic of the South Nepean Muslim Community, Rabbis Blum and Bulka of the Jewish faith and Dan Guthrie of the Christian congregation of Cedarview Alliance will be there. It was Imam Delic who said to me at the vigil that we held in Nepean after this massacre in Quebec that we must be righteous, not self-righteous, and that has stuck with me.

1400

I can tell you that I have seen that recent events prove that hate in all of its forms exists. In November, the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths were all attacked with graffiti and vandalism in order to intimidate people. What happened in Quebec City bears repeating because no person in this country should go into their place of worship expecting that they may never leave their place of worship.

On Saturday, my daughter’s hockey team was in a rural community outside of Ottawa. I’m proud of them

because not only are they a great team—they had a good winning record that weekend—but they’re very diverse. It was once said to me by the head of the United Way in Ottawa that they are the United Nations. They look so beautiful. Three girls on that team are South Asian. As we walked down the street, they were yelled at about the N-word. Thankfully my daughter didn’t know what it meant, but that hate existed this past weekend, and those girls are 11 and 12 years old.

Last night, swastikas were sprayed in Hamilton. Hate is everywhere around us, and it’s not something I’m comfortable with. It is not something I want my daughter to grow up with. It’s true that as a Legislature, we have frequently condemned hate activity against Ontarians. Sometimes we’ve done this generally. Other times we have done it quite specifically through non-binding motions like this or even through private members’ bills.

This is a non-binding motion. It’s true that it’s not going to change anything by the letter of the law. However, it’s not out of the norm for us to support a community that feels threatened. I think this is an important gesture for our Muslim community.

As an MPP, I prefer to promote humanity, inclusion and tolerance as a way to bring people together. I’m proud of my leader, Patrick Brown—that when I called him this past weekend and said, “I think we should support this motion,” he was going to call me to say we were going to do the same. I appreciate that because sometimes the wedge politics that exist in all political parties can dissuade us from doing the right thing. We did the right thing on this. Those who want to play wedge politics—I just ask them and I would appeal to them to please stop it.

All Ontarians should feel safe and secure in their province, regardless of their religion, race, language, sexual orientation or their gender. I, for one, will never accept or tolerate any segment of my constituency in Nepean–Carleton being targeted because they look, speak or pray differently.

The truth is: Most of us just get up in the morning and hope that we have enough money to put food on the table, pay our mortgage and keep our children safe. In this debate, as in every debate about hatred, I think we need that to be our starting point.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion on Islamophobia and systemic racism. I also want to commend the member from Ottawa–Vanier for bringing this motion forward.

The province’s challenges with racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and intolerance are real. Our leader, Andrea Horwath of the NDP, worked together with thousands of Ontarians and pushed for the Anti-Racism Directorate. The Premier took action to implement it.

The directorate initiated a consultation process in select cities across the province. At the first meeting here in Ontario, Premier Wynne stated that “this government hasn’t done enough on racism,” that “systemic racism

exists,” and that part of doing her job “is acknowledging that we haven’t done enough.” I’m glad to see that the government is taking action.

Sadly, xenophobia and Islamophobia are also on the rise in Ontario. Recent headlines read that we are at epidemic levels, as hate crimes against Muslim Canadians have more than doubled in the last three years even as the total number of hate crimes has dropped. Ontario has the highest hate crime rate, with 4.8 hate crimes per 100,000 people.

Every member in this chamber knows, or they should know, that the time for action is now. I am genuinely glad to see that this motion is now in front of the Legislature. I know that the member from Ottawa–Vanier has a strong history of action with civil liberties. I hope that she’ll be able to use her influence with all of us and within her caucus to ensure that there is action behind the words we hear today, because each and every incident of racism, violence and hatred represents missed opportunities for this government and all of us, that they have teachable moments that could have inspired education campaigns and solidarity with marginalized people and communities who are living daily in fear.

We as leaders and representatives of our communities need to be loud and clear that there is no place for Islamophobia in Ontario, that there is no place for anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia or racism of any kind. If we follow those words with real action and education, we can truly become the inclusive, multi-cultural and accepting province that we want to be and that we are.

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

Mr. John Fraser: *Remarks in Arabic.*

I want to start by thanking the member from Ottawa–Vanier for bringing forward this motion.

Ottawa South is a community that families from 125 different countries, speaking 90 languages, have chosen to make home. We live together; we work together; we go to school together; we raise our children together. We are neighbours. There are not many places in the world where what I just described happens. It’s in many communities across Ontario. We live in a very special place, and it takes work to preserve that. That is why we are here today: We have some work to do.

A phobia is an irrational fear. Make no mistake: Islamophobia is real. I’ve witnessed it in my community through vandalism and harassment, and in words from people whom I would least expect it from. We’ve seen the results of Islamophobia in its extreme, and what it can yield, most recently in Quebec City. It is heartsickening.

I am privileged to represent many Muslim families. They are our friends and our neighbours, and we stand with you.

Speaker, there is a political discourse south of the border that is poison—a cancer. And as the member from Nepean–Carleton said, we’re not immune. Here in Canada, we have politicians here using that same fear and mistrust for their own personal gain. We have

organizations using Islamophobia as a marketing tool—click-bait for profit—and then discounting it by using “free speech” as a specious shield.

I want all Muslim families in Ottawa South, and indeed all Muslim families in Ontario, to know that all of us in this Legislature stand with you. In this Legislature and in our communities, all of us will always speak out against any form of hatred and discrimination when we find it.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Salaam alaikom. Wa rahkmat ullah wa barakatu to the 100-plus members of the Muslim community. I would like to salute my colleague the MPP from Ottawa–Vanier, but most especially I would like to salute not only all members of this Legislature, but especially the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier.

Premier, it is you who set the tone, the direction, the inspiration for multiculturalism, pluralism, diversity and inclusivity. As members of the community have said to me, thank God we’ve got Trudeau in Ottawa and thank God we’ve got Kathleen Wynne in Ontario, because if we didn’t, we can see examples elsewhere.

I salute as well the six individuals who lost their lives and, perhaps just as importantly, the 17 children who were left fatherless by that senseless attack in Quebec City. As my honourable colleague the MPP for Ottawa–Vanier has said, “Il faut trouver les mots contre l’injustice.”

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It’s my pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West to speak this afternoon. I would like to applaud the member from Ottawa–Vanier for bringing this motion forward. It is a timely motion.

I’m proud to stand with Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath and all New Democrats in supporting this important and timely motion. I hope that today all members of the Legislature can agree that systemic racism and Islamophobia have no place in Ontario.

1410

The tragic events in Quebec recently, and in Peterborough in 2015, shocked the conscience of people throughout the province. These devastating attacks brought to light the severity of prejudice towards people of Muslim faith, a prejudice that many Muslims in our province experience on a daily basis. There is a growing tide of anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiments. The rhetoric breeds hate and, ultimately, violence. This is why it is necessary that this motion specifically mention combating hatred, hostility, prejudice and racism towards people who practise the Muslim faith.

Acceptance and diversity are foundational to our shared identity as Ontarians. When this acceptance is threatened, Ontarians expect their government to act swiftly to ensure that our province remains a welcoming place for all those residing here. While it’s true that a

motion does not bind the government to act, I hope that passing this motion will challenge the members of this chamber and all people living in Ontario to take action to end Islamophobia in our province. I hope that the government will heed the advice of this motion and direct the Anti-Racism Directorate to address and prevent systemic racism across government policy, programs and services, and increase anti-racism education and awareness, including Islamophobia, in all parts of the province.

I'd like to talk specifically about my riding, because this is a very serious and very heavy discussion and we're talking a lot about hate. What I would like to do is highlight some of the wonderful things, the contributions that the Muslim community brings to Windsor and Essex county. I know I share this sentiment with my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh and my colleague from Essex when we talk about the many contributions that the people of the Muslim community bring to the broader community of Windsor and Essex county.

There was a Windsor Star article from not quite two years ago that highlighted that Windsor's Muslim families, over a two-week period, opened up their homes—so their private, personal space—to anybody who wanted to come into their home and visit, so that they could show people from all different faiths, from all different races, from different genders and from different backgrounds what it's like to be someone of the Muslim faith. What they showed everybody is they are no different than you are, than I am, than anybody else in this province. They want their kids to go to school and have a good education. They want to be able to go out and go shopping without people attacking them. They are no different than anybody in this chamber.

There was another article from just about a year and a half ago that highlighted that between 8,000 and 9,000 bags of food have been donated in my community, in greater Windsor and Essex county, from the Share the Spirit of Ramadan food drive. That's been going on for almost 12 years now. In 2015, they had already donated 8,000 to 9,000 bags of food. This Share the Spirit of Ramadan food drive was to show that those of the Muslim faith, during Ramadan, because they fast, understand that there are other people out there who are struggling and who face hunger. What they have done is they have gone out and started to do food drives and contribute to the food banks and various organizations in our community.

I think it's really important that as we stand here and talk about the very difficult things that they are dealing with—that we are all dealing with; it's our job for all of us to address the issues that they're facing—that we also take time to highlight the contributions that the Muslim communities bring to our broader communities and to the province of Ontario. For that I would like to thank you.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to first start by extending all of our condolences to six innocent men who are no longer with us—men who were just praying in a place of

worship. This is a very serious issue because never in the history of Canada have we had a mass killing of the nature we saw in Quebec City, in a place of worship. It has changed things, which means that we all have to act together.

The day after the shooting, a father called my community office crying. He asked my staff whether it was safe for his son to go to school that day. My staff cried and said, “Of course. Not in our Ontario. Not in our Canada.”

So I'm extremely proud, very proud, that all members of this Legislature are standing together, shoulder by shoulder. Through our friends in the Muslim community, who are here today in the House, and through these cameras to all Muslims and Ontarians, we are saying no to hatred—hatred of all kinds, be it anti-Semitic, be it Islamophobic, be it anti-black racism or racism against indigenous people.

The kind of province we are building together, regardless of our political differences, is a province that puts people and their prosperity and success first. That has been the strength of this province. That has been the strength of our country. I just want to say to every single one of you that I'm very, very proud of you as Canadians for standing together and sending that very strong message, so that collectively and as one, we will get rid of all kinds of hatred, and support each other and promote each other as we build a prosperous Ontario for all people, especially our children.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I also want to greet the Muslim brothers and sisters in the House with the greeting salaam alaikom. I think it's important to acknowledge that we have a platform and we've seen our leader, Andrea Horwath, as well as our Premier use this greeting to celebrate Islam, to celebrate and to use our platform to tell people that this is a province and a country that celebrates diversity and is accepting of this unique and beautiful principle.

The tragedy in Quebec City we have all talked about was a heinous attack, and we need to understand that we are all one and we should stand together united against any form of discrimination. But to end discrimination, we must name it. That's why it's so powerfully important to name Islamophobia, to denounce Islamophobia, because hatred against one is hatred against us all. That's why we need to stand together. When we denounce Islamophobia, when we name it, when we call out this injustice, we're building a better society for all people.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I find this a little emotional, and so may our friends who are here, who I know have had some very tough times personally.

My grandmother wore a babushka—not much different than a niqab—when she came to this country and didn't speak English, and she had a horribly difficult time. As the Premier said, you hope you advance.

On behalf of many of the people from the mosques in my constituency: On July 1 they're opening their mosques, because someone walked in one and shot people. They're opening up their mosques without fear so people can come in, be loved and get great food and friendship. That's an act of courage. I hope every member of the Legislature will work with their local mosque on Canada Day and be there to open the doors to the communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I now return to the member from Ottawa–Vanier to wrap up.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: First, I want to thank the Premier, the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the third party, the members from London–Fanshawe, Nepean–Carleton, Ottawa South, Etobicoke North, Windsor West, the Attorney General, the MPP from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for all their eloquent testimonies and support for this motion.

I want to thank more the people in the audience who come from the Muslim community. I think we stand by your example. I want to say how proud I am to be the MPP for Ottawa–Vanier, because I wouldn't be here but for the fact that the Muslim community in my riding was speaking about the need for peace, the need for reconciliation, the need to speak out and tell it as it is. I give them credit today for the fact that not only did they speak in Ottawa–Vanier but we have the occasion to speak here in Ontario on behalf of all the Muslim community and to stand against hate. It's an important day. I'm very proud that this is my first gesture as part of this community. I want to say thank you.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of Private Members' Public Business.

VISITOR

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I want to recognize former member Frank Klees of the riding of York–Mackenzie in the 36th, Oak Ridges in the 37th and the 38th, and Newmarket–Aurora in the 39th and 40th Parliaments. Welcome to Queen's Park, Frank.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC
AMENDMENT ACT (SCHOOL BUS
CAMERA SYSTEMS), 2017
LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE
(SYSTÈMES PHOTOGRAPHIQUES
RELIÉS AUX AUTOBUS SCOLAIRES)

Mr. Nicholls moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems / Projet de loi 94, Loi modifiant le Code

de la route en ce qui concerne la preuve obtenue au moyen des systèmes photographiques reliés aux autobus scolaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Nicholls has moved second reading of Bill 94, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today to deliver my opening remarks during the debate of Bill 94, otherwise known as An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems.

For those of you who were not here for the debate of the previous version of this bill, let me start by explaining where this idea did in fact come from. At an event that I had organized back in the riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex in early 2014, a concerned bus driver told me about the shocking number of vehicles that blow by stopped school buses with their stop signs deployed and their red lights flashing as they pick up children. After the issue was brought to my attention, my office arranged a meeting with local school bus operators so that we could gain insights and expertise. They told me that I would not believe the number of drivers that, on a daily basis, pass buses with their stop lights flashing and stop arm extended. It was clear to them that we had a serious problem on our hands, but just how big was that problem?

One of the main issues was that there simply was not enough data available. Madam Speaker, unless you're a bus driver, you may not realize just how bad it truly is. The Independent School Bus Operators Association conducted a study in May of 2014 and counted a total of 754 incidents across Ontario. Thankfully, they were only close calls. Those incidents were recorded by a school bus consortium in Bruce-Grey, Huron-Perth, Thunder Bay, London, Toronto, eastern Ontario, Waterloo, Sudbury, Renfrew county and York.

Now, it's clear to me that we have a major problem on our hands, and I wanted to do whatever I could to stop a tragic accident before it occurs. Although the previous version of this bill enjoyed all-party support back in 2014, there were some criticisms made by members of the government side that I'd just like to address, and criticism is fair.

The first criticism was that making school bus cameras mandatory would be expensive. That particular worry from the government took me a little bit by surprise as the bill was only two pages long and it didn't mention anything about that. But back then, in 2014, and I reiterate again today—Bill 94 does not seek to make camera systems mandatory. The issue of how many buses should have cameras and who pays can be settled between municipalities and the various companies that provide these systems. That has nothing to do with this bill.

Additionally, the government raised potential privacy concerns, and I'm glad they did. So we checked it out. Luckily, one of the companies that provides these camera

systems has already met with the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, and there were no concerns there at all. So that's a plus.

Speaker, I'd also like to point out that I don't blame the government, nor the Ministry of Transportation, for this problem. Blow bys of stopped school buses happen all too frequently across this country, as well as in other jurisdictions. As the former PC critic for community safety, this issue is still first and foremost on my mind.

The MTO has put a lot of effort into education and awareness to address this problem. Our police officers do fantastic work, as do our bus drivers, but the reality is that the status quo just isn't working. New technology is part of that answer.

I would also like to acknowledge the support that I've received from the member from Ottawa South, who has been a great champion for the safety of his constituents and shown a lot of interest in this issue.

As I mentioned, this problem is not limited to Ontario. In 2013, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services counted more than 85,000 violations in 29 states in a single day. While that is an astounding figure, it's only the tip of the iceberg, as the survey sampled less than 25% of the nation's school buses. In all, it was estimated that 15 million stop-arm running violations occurred in 2013 in the United States.

In Georgia, where, unfortunately, 11 children were killed in accidents when drivers blew by school bus stop signs since 1995, Cobb County has installed cameras on only 10% of its buses. But we're different here in Ontario. We care about our children and we want to do whatever we can to protect the lives of these little ones, which could be a son, a daughter, a grandson, a granddaughter or even a neighbour. Executive Director of Transportation Rick Grisham said that as many as 1,000 stop-arm violations were in fact reported each day in the district before camera use started in 2010. "Along with people seeing the cameras on the sides of buses, word of mouth is big. People get one ticket and they tell all their neighbours. People aren't taking the chance anymore because they know they're going to get caught," Grisham said.

Speaker, this technology works. Additionally, the use of this technology is providing very important data for municipalities to make bus routes safer before a tragic accident occurs.

In Waterloo, the data obtained by a stop-arm camera on a bus showed that one stop in particular was having a lot more blow bys than any other stop. Because of this new information, this stop was moved to a safer location, and the number of blow bys went down.

So, what can we do to help? My bill is limited in scope. It doesn't seek to sort out who must install stop-arm cameras, as that is the decision that is best made by municipalities, bus operators and the experts at the Ministry of Transportation. What this bill seeks to do is to ensure that communities that have begun pilot projects for stop-arm cameras on school buses and other communities that will follow won't face any roadblocks when

they attempt to use the evidence they have gathered in court.

Bill 94 would amend the Highway Traffic Act to treat photos or videos obtained by those cameras like evidence obtained through red-light cameras. Currently, a police officer, bus driver or other witness has to attend court even when clear evidence of a blow by is available. Just like red-light cameras, we need to make a simple update to the act to include new technology. This will keep bus drivers and police officers at work instead of waiting in court. This is something that is already occurring in many jurisdictions in the United States, as well as Canada. A number of states have already passed laws allowing the use of cameras on school buses to capture video images of motorists illegally passing and endangering children.

1430

It is clear that the historic approach to this issue is not working. As an example, in Niagara region, only 12 people were charged for failing to stop for a school bus in 2015, 12 in 2014 and 10 in 2013. If you speak to any bus driver, they can tell you that many, many more infractions are occurring each and every day, but it is very difficult to get a charge and then a conviction.

Bus drivers are somehow expected to safely operate a large vehicle, ensure the safety of the children on board the bus as well as those exiting the bus, be mindful of pedestrians and traffic, and if a car happens to blow by their stop arm, they are supposed to accurately remember the licence plate and other information about the car. It's no surprise that very few people are caught.

Our bus drivers safely bring over 800,000 students to school each morning and drop them off every afternoon. It takes a lot of dedication to ensure this is done safely. Frankly, they don't get enough recognition for all the work that they do.

When I introduced the previous version of this bill, I received a letter of support from the Ontario School Bus Association. The letter stated that they support my bill "which proposes the use of cameras on school buses to capture video images of motorists illegally passing school buses stopped with their red warning lights flashing. The video images can be used by police as evidence to prosecute owners of offending vehicles rather than the driver. These cameras, commonly referred to as 'stop-arm cameras,' have proven effective in other jurisdictions across North America by increasing the prosecution rate and raising awareness of the consequences of breaking the law."

Any school bus driver will tell you that illegal passing is a regular occurrence on Ontario roads. Motorists who are either distracted, not paying attention, in a hurry or unaware of the law illegally pass school buses that are stopped with the red warning lights flashing. The consequences of this behaviour can be injury or death of a child getting on or off the school bus. Stop-arm cameras would augment the on-road enforcement efforts by police in areas of the province where illegal passing of school buses is in fact a problem.

The Ontario School Bus Association has expressed “support for an effort by MPP Rick Nicholls, Chatham–Kent–Essex, to amend the Highway Traffic Act.” Les Cross, the Ontario School Bus Association president, was quoted as saying, “Any school bus driver will tell you that illegal passing is a regular occurrence on Ontario’s roads. The consequences of this behaviour can be injury or death of a child getting on or off a school bus.”

That is why, Madam Speaker, I implore this Legislature to support Bill 94 at its second reading as well as to then push hard to get this bill into committee so it can become law.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise in this House today on behalf of my community in London West to speak in support of Bill 94, the legislation that we are debating here today. Certainly, when we had this debate previously, when the bill had been introduced by the member in the last session of Parliament, members of my caucus also expressed support for this initiative, and we will continue to do so.

I have a background in education. For 13 years, I was a trustee on the Thames Valley District School Board. School bus safety is a huge concern for parents.

Yesterday was Pink Shirt Day. We were talking about bullying prevention. We know that the school bus is a prime location for bullying to take place. That is a concern for parents. Parents, when they put their kids on the school bus in the morning, want their kids to arrive safely at the school without being bullied or harassed on the way, and, of course, they want their kids to arrive safely home at night.

I appreciate the member’s comments that the amendments he is proposing in this bill are somewhat limited in scope. What this bill does is it allows photographs from school bus cameras to be used as evidence against drivers who fail to stop for a school bus that is picking up or dropping off passengers. It would allow evidence from school bus cameras to go into the court process and be used as evidence, similar to photographs from red-light cameras that are currently being used as evidence in court cases.

This is very important. There is no question that this kind of initiative could save children’s lives. The member mentioned the study that shows we have 800,000 students in this province who are riding school buses back and forth to school every day. This means 18,000 buses that are driving up and down the roads in our communities, driving nearly two million kilometres each day.

We know currently we have a process where we have 600 schools up for review and potential closure. If those closures happen, we could have many, many more students riding school buses in this province, which means that we have to be much more vigilant about ensuring that children are safe when they’re riding school buses, because the risks are going to be that much greater as you have more and more children riding school buses.

Children are vulnerable to accidents, to being hit by a driver who does not stop when a school bus is stopping, which they are legally required to do.

We know there was a study by the Independent School Bus Operator Association that looked at school bus operations in Grey-Bruce, Huron-Perth, Thunder Bay, in my community of London, in Toronto, eastern Ontario, Waterloo, Sudbury, Renfrew county and York. Basically, it was a very representative study of communities across the province. That study determined that there were a total of 754 incidents that occurred with children getting on and off the bus over a five-day period, one school week, in May of 2014. That averages out to be 151 incidents per day for those school bus operators. So there is a need to ensure that when those incidents happen and, for those drivers who have broken the law and failed to stop, their cases go to court, the evidence from a school bus camera could be used as part of the trial process.

The incidents that I was just referring to, those 151 average incidents per day: The majority of them, 75% of those incidents, occurred when drivers were passing from the front. If we have a school bus camera on the front of the bus when these incidents happen, that evidence could be easily captured and used in the court process.

We also had been raising the issue when this bill was last debated, and I did want to flag it again, that more than simply allowing evidence from school bus cameras to be entered into the court process, we need some proactive measures. This bill accepts the fact that these incidents are going to happen, that drivers are going to continue to break the law, and it ensures that there will be a way to use evidence in the legal process. But instead of just accepting that the law will continue to be broken, although there’s no doubt this would provide some sort of deterrence, there is also strong support from the Independent School Bus Operator Association for mandatory pre-stop amber warning lights, a flashing yellow light, just as we have with our traffic lights, that would alert drivers that a school bus is about to stop and let passengers on and off.

1440

With that, Speaker, I’m going to wrap up my comments, but I did want to congratulate the member for bringing this bill forward and express my full support.

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It’s a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 94, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act (School Bus Camera Systems). I want to congratulate the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex on a well-thought-out bill on a very important issue.

As a parent, as a father, nothing makes me angrier than when I’m on the road and I see some moron pass a school bus that has the arm extended. It makes me livid. It’s not my child on that bus, but it’s somebody else’s children on that bus. I can think of no more careless or reckless act that a driver can commit than to speed past a school bus that has that arm extended. To do that is an invitation for a tragedy. Anything that we can

collectively do to improve the safety of our children as they come and go to school every day is something that's most welcome.

Madam Speaker, I know that studies already show that going to school on a school bus is actually one of the safest ways for a child to get there—safer than in their parents' vehicle. But any tragedies that occur around school buses are things that are preventable. I think this proposal from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex is something that we do need to support at this stage, that we should also study further to understand how this kind of a proposal can be implemented to be effective.

I do want to draw a parallel to another piece of legislation that's before the House, because it's dealing with a similar issue. Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act, which proposes to bring in photo radar to discourage speeding in school zones, is a similar measure to protect our children. I support the notion that photo evidence from a camera on a school bus is a legitimate form of evidence to use to convict somebody of an offence. I trust that the member opposite would equally support this other piece of legislation, which would say photo evidence from photo radar would be sufficient to convict somebody for speeding in a school zone. To me, Madam Speaker, it's the same issue. It's about protecting our children as they come and go to school.

So I applaud the member for this initiative and I do hope that it gets implemented, because I would certainly see this as a strong deterrent to those people who perhaps are a little bit careless when they see a school bus. Similar to what the member from the New Democratic Party said, if this was accompanied by signage on a school bus, perhaps by amber lights that flash in advance—anything that we could do to notify a driver that the bus is going to stop, that our children are going to be coming and going from that school bus, so that we don't have tragedies.

I am wholeheartedly in favour of fining to the maximum extent of the law those people who choose to ignore our children's safety, and if it means that perhaps the owner of the vehicle gets the ticket in the mail, as opposed to the driver, well, so be it. Let that owner be more careful about who they let use their vehicle.

I'll finish on that note. I think it's a great initiative and I hope the member opposite supports other initiatives in a similar vein with the same kind of technology.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's a great honour to be able to stand up today in the Legislature and speak to this important piece of legislation that has been put forward by the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

It's a great honour to be able to speak to this issue because this is a very, very important issue. I have heard on multiple subjects and from multiple parties and from multiple members of this House about the importance of our children and about the importance of the future that those children have.

I'm very passionate about youth issues. I'm very passionate about ensuring that we have a bright future for

all those who are growing up in this beautiful province of ours, who have a strong future and a prosperous tomorrow to look forward to.

My fear is that one of these precious children—I have 17 nephews and nieces and I love absolutely every one of them to pieces, but I'm worried that one of them may be, in fact, torn to pieces by a car in one of these instances.

This is a very matter-of-fact piece of legislation that is going to address a real problem that we currently have in Ontario a lot. It's going to address a real and very valid concern with the future and safety of children here in Ontario.

During the last election, I had an opportunity to knock on a lot of doors and talk to a lot of people, which was an amazing experience and one I look forward to repeating in the upcoming election. At that time, I also had the opportunity to speak with many mothers and fathers who are actually concerned about this issue. Now, whether it was hoping to get speed bumps, that cars would slow down at bus stops, or whether it was hoping that police would be able to enforce speed limits on school properties, this was a major issue that came up time and time again.

Now, I regret to confess that since I've been elected I've done my best to bring forward all the issues that many of the voters in my riding of Niagara West–Glanbrook brought forward to me, but, unfortunately, I did neglect this until I was reminded by this bill. So it gives me great pleasure to stand today and support the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex's bill, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, also known as the school bus camera systems.

The reality is, numerous blow bys happen and we have the ability to prevent that. Now, obviously, we can't prevent every single one, but we can make a huge step in the right direction by implementing this policy that would not force municipalities—this is something to ensure that we're focusing on; this is not a mandatory piece of legislation that is going to force municipalities to invest vast quantities of money into their school bus systems.

I was really interested to hear the honourable member speak about word of mouth. This is something that I agree with wholeheartedly. I'm 19. I'm a young driver. I have lots of friends who are young drivers and, to be quite honest, I'm ashamed that some of them even have their licences, and I won't go into any names. But the reality is, word of mouth travels fast. We've seen this with cameras in school districts. We've seen how effective that can be at reducing driver speed in these areas. I hope that this measure will have a similar impact, knowing that there's that proactive response, that the onus is no longer simply on the driver to handle a bus full of kids, watch 40 kids and also have to memorize someone's licence plate, the make of the car, the model of the car, the colour of the car and get all that information down. It is something that I think would be extremely difficult, so I'm pleased that the member beside me is bringing this forward.

In my own home region of Niagara, we've seen that 12 people were charged for failing to stop for a school bus in 2015, 12 in 2014 and 10 in 2013. But the reality is, this is nothing compared to the actual bus blow bys.

School boards in PEI, Alberta and Manitoba all have cameras on school buses, but Ontario school boards have yet to jump on this idea. So I'm excited that this is a proactive response to a very real safety issue. Children are our future. We say that in a clichéd way, we say that in colloquial way, but this is a deep truth, and that's why it's repeated so often in this Legislature.

1450

I'm very, very excited to support this piece of legislation from the honourable member. I encourage all members in this House, whether or not you have children, to support this piece of legislation and protect all our children.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise to speak to private member's Bill 94, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act. As a former school board trustee, I certainly can support the idea of putting cameras on buses to try and stop those who would run—or what they call a “blow by”—past school buses and put children's lives at risk. I'll touch more on that in a bit.

I'd like to talk about an issue that is directly related to school buses, and that is the bus drivers, because they play a pivotal role in the safety of the students who are riding the school buses every day. Some of them have students on their buses for hours a day, and so we expect that our bus drivers are given the opportunity to provide the best service that they can in order to keep students safe. Unfortunately, that is not currently the case. With the education system funded the way that it is and boards being so strapped for cash and having to balance budgets, often what they do is form consortiums. You'll find that the public board, both English and French, will share buses with the Catholic board, both English and French, and other schools. When they have students that are travelling around similar routes, they'll share buses. But what happens is, those boards all come together and say, “These are the budget constraints that we're in and this is the money that we have available in order to provide busing for students,” and what we're finding is that, more and more, there's a race to the bottom when it comes to those companies that actually provide the school buses and the services.

What we also find is that school bus drivers are some of the lowest-paid people in this province. There often is a high turnover because it's a stressful job. Imagine having a bus full of young people, and it is your job to keep them safe, to make sure that they get to school on time, to make sure that they get home, to make sure they get off at the right stop, and to make sure that they're not fighting with each other and causing harm to each other. It's a very stressful job. Then, on top of that, you're worried about somebody in a vehicle not stopping when you have stopped to let children off, and possibly a child

getting hit by a car. Yet, they are some of the lowest-paid people in this province.

They are also some of the most precariously employed, or unstably employed, in this province. So when the school boards get together and send out an RFP or a tender for school bus services, what happens is, it often goes to the lowest bidder. These operators are not always the safest operators. They don't always properly inspect their school buses. That's not the drivers' fault. But when they switch from one school bus provider to another, something happens that's called contract flipping, which means that the school bus drivers who previously had driven that bus no longer are employed to drive buses anymore. They actually have to reapply to the new company for a job. So often what you find is that we are losing school bus drivers.

One of the best ways to ensure the safety of the students on the buses is to make sure that we are using skilled and experienced school bus drivers. So I would implore the government side to really take a look at how they're funding the education system and how the tendering process takes place, to ensure that there is stability when it comes to the people who are actually driving our school buses. Frankly, in my opinion, they should be getting the same wages as somebody who's driving one of our municipal buses. They're charged with the same responsibilities. The only difference is that all of their riders are young people.

Specifically to having cameras on buses: We see more and more that people are in a rush to get wherever it is they're going. It's not always to work; sometimes they're in a big rush to get to the Tim Hortons to get their coffee. Sometimes they're in a big rush to go pick up another child from somewhere else. Sometimes they're distracted, which is an entirely different issue: Sometimes they're on the phone; sometimes they're rummaging for something on the seat beside them.

So I think it's important—and as one of the previous members mentioned, word gets out pretty fast when there is enforcement and when there is follow-through. When somebody does a blow by, when someone doesn't stop when a school bus is stopped and letting students off, when somebody who goes past the bus is actually caught and the law is enforced—as that happens more and more, I think we'll find fewer and fewer people are actually running past the buses as the students are getting off. My hope is that this will address the issue.

I do have questions around who is going to be responsible for putting the cameras on the buses, who's going to be responsible for paying for those cameras and how the enforcement is going to roll out in the municipalities, but I think that this is a really good first step to ensuring the safety of students on buses.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm pleased to stand today to speak in support of Bill 94, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems. I do want to congratulate the

member on bringing it forward. I've had an opportunity on a number of occasions to talk to him about it. I have had the opportunity to speak to many people who are advocates for this piece of legislation as well, too. I think, as technology goes forward, we have to utilize it to ensure things like public safety. We have red-light cameras—there are a lot of things—cameras in taxis. They protect people. We need to find a way to enable those things.

The hardest thing, probably, for a parent is to take your child to the school bus stop for the first day, put them on a school bus and then be there when they come back home. There's an expectation. There's an expectation that they'll be safe. Sometimes there are tragic consequences. We know it's far safer to travel in a school bus than it is in a regular car, but that doesn't mean that—we've got thousands of school bus trips with hundreds of thousands of children on school buses, so why would we not take a look at the opportunity to look at safety, to look through that lens?

I agree with the member from Windsor West: We ask a lot of the people who drive our school buses, and their responsibility. This, as I can see and as has been demonstrated to me, can be an effective tool for them. It is pretty hard. You get a blow by; you have to get the plates; you have to worry about the kid; and you have another 20 of them behind you. It is asking of a lot of people. I know that in Ottawa, Ottawa city council has called for the ability to do that. I know they've done some—I'm not sure if it's a pilot, but I know they've done a lot of work. My friend Rob Wilkinson and all of those people associated with him have been doing some work on looking at that issue. It is an important one.

I do want to connect it back, though, as well, to the Safer School Zones Act. That's an act that we have in front of us right now that will allow for technology to enable us to better secure those zones and enforce the rules that are already in place, because that's what we're talking about. We're not making new rules—maybe some new evidentiary rules, but we're not making new rules, because there is a prohibition on doing that. It is exceptionally dangerous. For those instances when that happens, it is horrific. You can't turn it around.

I'm supportive of this piece of legislation. From a perspective of public safety, I have put forward the Protecting Passenger Safety Act, which had to do with protecting passengers in taxis, ensuring that the proper things were in place, like insurance and safety checks—that those were the things that needed to be there.

One of the things—if I can beg your indulgence—is window tinting. That's something we have to look at. That's a serious issue. When you send your kids to school, moms teach them that, when you cross the street, you look into the eyes of the person driving the car before you cross the street. Look both ways and look into their eyes. If you can't see them, that's a problem.

I have to say again that I'm glad to support this bill. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward and look forward to it getting through debate.

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

1500

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 94, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act. We're talking today about having school bus camera systems so that it's not the responsibility solely of the bus driver, who we know is very preoccupied with all the children in the bus, to take down a licence plate number, maybe a driver's description even, but a description certainly of the car, if a car passes a school bus when it's stopped with the lights flashing and the stop sign out and everything else, because small children could be crossing in front of the bus. There have been numerous instances where children have been hurt by people passing by in cars—or almost hurt.

I just want to mention that this is the second time that I'm getting to speak on this. While it's an honour and a privilege to rise and speak in support of the great work that my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex is doing, unfortunately, that had passed second reading and this is pretty much the same bill, only with a few updates for new technology. Unfortunately, because the Legislature was prorogued, we're doing the work again. Sometimes that's not such a bad thing. We are hearing some new updates, but we certainly don't want that to happen again. We have an election in less than a year and a half. Let's see this get to committee quickly, let's get through the committee, the amendments, bring it back for third reading and see it pass before the next election. I think that's very important.

The reason we're talking about this today is because bus drivers are very rattled, and as the member from Windsor West said, we're struggling to find people who are going to drive our kids to school, for various reasons. But one of them certainly has to be that they are frustrated by the fact that they're doing, really, a community service—yes it's a job, a career, but they're also doing a community service and they feel they don't have the support of their communities. That's a real problem. I think it's something that we as legislators really try to do in our own ridings when we go to community events and meet with community members. There are ratepayer associations and other neighbourhood associations. How do we get those communities to act like a community?

We all know it takes a village to raise a child, and that's not just an expression. Everybody who is driving around shouldn't be cautious just if they have children in the neighbourhood. They should feel that they have some sense of responsibility for all children in that neighbourhood.

Too often we hear of the problems with school buses in more urban areas, particularly in the suburbs which I represent, in the 905 area. We're not suggesting, I think, today in the Legislature to have anything mandatory. We recognize that some areas of the province wouldn't need these cameras, certainly in rural areas, or maybe there's some great community spirit where they're having public

awareness campaigns and the bus drivers don't feel it's a problem.

We don't think it's terribly expensive. We know of cars now where people are putting dash cams on their cars, for very little expense, to protect themselves from liability. Or maybe they're just doing it as a hobby and they like to see how their drive to work went over again. I'm not quite sure why people decide to put the dash cams in except for if they feel that were they in an accident, they're worried that they're going to be found at fault and they want to prove otherwise.

That's exactly the case with these cameras. If a car is going by a school bus, yes, it's illegal, but unfortunately, too often a bus driver and a police officer have to go to court and have to testify. There isn't enough pressure on drivers to be cautious. Maybe this is a way to remind the drivers to think before they drive by that school bus. There's no excuse for being that distracted that you didn't realize you were driving by a school bus. They're pretty obvious out on our roads.

I don't know if other people here have seen the new signage of a small child when there's a construction site. The sign basically says something—I'll paraphrase—"My dad works here" or "My mom works here," to be fair. That I think is a very powerful message and way to get across to people that these are people working here: "This is somebody's father, somebody's mother. Slow down. It's a construction zone." As opposed to the usual signage, which just says, "Construction workers, 40 km/hour" instead of 60 km/hour.

Maybe that's something we can raise awareness of with the school buses: to have something on the bus that also has a small child, or having the parents say, "My child is on the bus," the way cars have "Baby on board," because I think that too often people are living in a world very focused on their own family, their own needs, and not respecting the fact that another few seconds of their time can mean the difference between not just life or death of another human being but the complete destruction of that family unit.

So I hope that we're going to do something in the Legislature very important today and move forward on getting it to committee to discuss having cameras on buses. I believe when I spoke to the staff for my colleague, he mentioned that there's a system already in place, that the cameras would only record when the arm is out. So it's not as though there are any privacy issues, and I think the member mentioned that previously.

But in committee, I am guessing that we're going hear about other issues of safety to do with buses and getting our kids to school safely, in terms of rowdy kids on the buses, in terms of a lack of respect in general for safety on the bus. Maybe we can have bus monitors—older children on the bus. Maybe we'll hear from people in the community. I'm really looking forward to that.

Hopefully it will be my committee he's choosing to send it to. If not, I'll go and watch the committee to hear the people from the community, the parents, the bus drivers, the first responders, the police or whoever feels

it's imperative that they voice their concerns and support for this important project.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to have a chance to speak to Bill 94 from our friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex and talk about this incredible issue.

We sometimes think about school buses being more of a rural issue, but I've got tell you, it's as much an urban issue now, certainly in Toronto, with the various school boards and busier streets, and the school buses that pick kids up and take them across various distances.

I know it's an issue of intense importance, particularly to one of my constituents. Her name is Sarah Severn. She's a wonderful adult who pipes; she's a bagpiper. She pipes in all my parades. She works as a crossing guard, and when she saw that we were discussing this issue today, she sent me a little note: "Wow, this is an important issue." She sees school buses parked all the time with kids getting off and people not respecting it, so it's an issue. I know Sarah will be watching today, so thanks, Sarah, for that note. I really appreciate you coming forward with it.

A school bus is kind of interesting from my perspective because a school bus issue is partly to credit for me having the opportunity to be in this Legislature. Speaker, as you may know, I represent an area of Crescent Town, where there are five or six buildings—12,000 people living in an area of maybe two square miles. They have their own school right there, Crescent Town Elementary School. Because there are so many people and a lot of new Canadians coming to Crescent Town, lots of young families, the school was getting too full; there was not enough space in the school. Grades 5 and 6 were being asked to walk up the street to another elementary school, George Webster Elementary. It's about two and a half kilometres away. It's a good hike for a nine-year-old or 10-year-old child to take, particularly in winter, where you're coming out onto a very busy main street, Dawes Road, having to cross and go up.

There were a number of near misses and such, and the parents were concerned. They had gone to the school board, the local trustee: "You need to get these children a bus, certainly the grade 5s, but if you're there, grades 5 and 6." The response was, "No, it's close enough. You have to walk." I think the measure is 2.6 kilometres in order to be entitled to a bus. They were at 2.5.

The parents were so concerned. That has to be the thing we reflect on. I know that's the essence of this bill: children's safety. The parents were so concerned, they started to hire a very entrepreneurial young man who had vans, and they would jam kids into the vans and they would charge the families \$100 a month to get their children to and from the George Webster school—\$100. These are low-wage, new Canadians, who can ill afford that money, particularly with one, two or three children.

I went, and at my first public meeting there, they said, "You have to get us a bus." I made a commitment in the campaign that if I were elected, I'd help them get a bus.

We had our public meeting after we were elected and it was the middle of June. We had to do this by September, and the school board was not sitting. There was absolutely no way we could get them a bus through the school board. So I went out and hired a bus. The parents were so appreciative, because for \$40 a child, we got them onto a safe bus, safe transit with certified drivers, using First Student and WoodGreen Community Services. You know, Speaker, that WoodGreen does great service in our community.

We had a bus on September 1, and the parents brought down and got their kids and they were very, very appreciative. They used that bus all through the month, and then they were told that the school board was going to provide a bus. When the local trustee realized that the newly elected Liberal got a bus that she couldn't get, she went and arranged for a bus so that on October 1, there were two buses, the one that she had arranged and the one that I arranged. I told the kids, "Take the free bus."

1510

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I turn back to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex to wrap up.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, I'd like to thank the members from London West, Windsor West, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Niagara West–Glanbrook, Thornhill, Beaches–East York and, of course, Ottawa South. Again, I want to give a shout-out to the member from Ottawa South for his support and advocacy for Bill 94, especially realizing that one of the pilots was actually conducted in Ottawa. He had an opportunity to spend time and speak with the police association up there.

Many times here at Queen's Park, we see a lot of school buses bringing children into the Ontario Legislature to view this great facility, so of course a shout-out to the bus drivers who get them here safely and get them home safely as well.

The Quebec Legislature has a similar bill at this point in time, but they've gone one step further. I would like to see this bill put into committee as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the last time this bill was brought forward, it passed second reading, but it sat and didn't go anywhere. I would really implore the government to, please, call this bill because the life they could be saving could be that of a family member or a neighbour as well.

Many, many, many years ago, I recall a TV commercial—it was probably in black and white—and here was this fictional character called José Jiménez. He was doing a commercial for the National Safety Council advocating seatbelts and the importance of seat belts. He went into his spiel about the importance of seat belts, and he's sitting on a bar stool as he's talking. When he finished up, he stood up only to realize that the National Safety Council had taken a seat belt, tied it underneath the bar stool and attached it across his lap. Of course, his comment was, "This National Safety Council, they think of everything."

Why do I remember things like that? Because I want to be an advocate. I'm not suggesting that I walk around

with a stop arm on my left arm and lights flashing above my head, but I want to be advocate to ensure that our children are kept safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

Orders of the day.

ASBESTOS USE

PROHIBITION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 INTERDISANT

L'UTILISATION DE L'AMIANTE

Mr. Bailey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act prohibiting the use of asbestos / Projet de loi 88, Loi interdisant l'utilisation de l'amiante.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm very pleased to rise in the Legislature today to start the debate on Bill 88, the Asbestos Use Prohibition Act, 2017. This is a very important piece of legislation, and I hope it will receive the full support of all members of this Legislature to have the bill passed into law as quickly as possible.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize both Sara Trotta and Kelly Gorman of the Canadian Cancer Society, who are with us today in the west members' gallery. The Canadian Cancer Society has been very supportive of Bill 88. Of course, they've also been working for a long time at the federal level to achieve a ban of all asbestos and the creation of a public registry in federal buildings. I am pleased that they have given me their support to extend similar protections here at a provincial level.

I'd also like to knowledge both Mr. Hassan Yussuff of the Canadian Labour Congress and his colleague Mr. Chris Buckley of the Ontario Federation of Labour, who have also discussed with me Bill 88 and their support. Mr. Vern Edwards, the occupational health safety and environment director, and Ms. Laurie Hardwick, director of organization services at the Ontario Federation of Labour, are with us today in the west members' gallery. Mr. Buckley, Mr. Edwards, Ms. Hardwick and Mr. Yussuff represent millions and millions of workers in both the private and public sector areas. They wake up every day and go to bed every night thinking about safety of their members in the workplace.

I share that focus with them. As I've mentioned numerous times in this Legislature, before I was elected here, I worked in Sarnia–Lambton's petrochemical industry for more than 30 years. I'm proud to say that despite the dangerous nature of the work that is done in Sarnia–Lambton's Chemical Valley, you are 25 times safer in that environment today than in any other part of the province, mainly because of stringent safety measures that have been put in place by both industry and

organized labour, measures like eliminating the use of asbestos and asbestos-related products. They have also undergone major asbestos abatement projects and removed any asbestos-related products from facilities that are identified. I, in fact, worked on some of those projects before I came here.

Ideally, I would like to see the same laser focus on eliminating the potential for asbestos exposure extended across this entire province and in workplaces of all provincial public sector employees. Again, I would like to thank the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress for supporting me in this effort.

The Asbestos Use Prohibition Act takes the first steps to achieving that goal. It supports and builds upon the promises that have been recently made by our federal Canadian government. Specifically, Bill 88, the Asbestos Use Prohibition Act, would ban the use, reuse, import, transport or sale of asbestos in Ontario. Bill 88 calls on the government and the Ministry of Labour to create and maintain a provincial public registry of all provincially owned or leased buildings containing asbestos. Bill 88 would require that any asbestos abatement work that is conducted on a provincially owned or leased building would be reported to the Ministry of Labour and that those reports would be used to update this register on a timeline which would be specified by the regulations.

I made the decision to look at developing a private member's bill to ban asbestos after attending many National Day of Mourning events in Sarnia, always held on April 28 of every year. Every year on April 28, families across the province—and the country, actually—gather to pay respects to and remember the thousands of workers who have been killed, injured or suffered illness in a work-related incident. In Sarnia, the Sarnia District Labour Council, the Victims of Chemical Valley, the Workers Health and Safety Centre, the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, and Sarnia Fire and Rescue Services host this events every year.

I've attended the event many times, but last year I was struck as I remembered that during the last federal election there had been a promise and a commitment made that they would pass a bill that asbestos would be banned, but nothing had happened yet. I decided that if the federal government hadn't acted yet at that time, I would do something here at the provincial level. I had the opportunity with my private member's bill to do that.

I asked my staff to look into what laws did exist in Ontario and what we could do as provincial legislators to create this ban and a public building registry. What we found was that there were lots of existing regulations for asbestos that are in place for older buildings across the province. What we found, though, was there were one statute and 19 regulations in Ontario that mentioned asbestos. Of those regulations, seven addressed the use and disposal of asbestos. That means that there is a giant loophole in the legislative framework that you can drive a truck through that still allows for the import and use of new, raw asbestos and asbestos products in Ontario

In fact, Globe and Mail reporter Tavia Grant has done a number of reports on this subject and has found that since Canada stopped mining asbestos in 2011, asbestos imports have nearly doubled in value to Canada, and obviously a large amount of that comes to Ontario. During the first eight months of 2016, more than \$4.3 million worth of asbestos was imported into Canada. It's not clear where this asbestos went once it was in the country; however, when one considers the use of the product, I think it's very reasonable to assume that most of that product ended up here in Ontario.

For years, asbestos has been used in aftermarket brake pads for cars. The honourable member for Guelph had previously introduced legislation on two occasions to ban the use of asbestos brake pads in Ontario. Unfortunately, those bills did not get called before committee by previous governments.

Another major use of asbestos in new installations today is in asbestos cement pipe, also known as transite or fibre cement pipe. The product is still being used in insulation for stormwater drainage in new condos, office buildings and even hospitals. Many believe that if proper handling and use procedures are followed, the product would be benign and there are few risks. I contend that there is no safe use. The reality is that these products break down over time, people forget, mistakes are made and accidents happen. By continuing to allow new asbestos products into the province, we are taking a gamble with the future health and well-being of Ontario residents.

Asbestos is the leading cause of death in the workplace. Seven out of 10 approved claims for occupational cancer death involve asbestos exposure. Workers' compensation statistics only include the number of successful claims. Anyone who doesn't have workplace coverage and doesn't file a claim, or whose claim isn't successful, isn't even counted in those numbers.

1520

Many researchers in the field of asbestos-related cancers believe that only about half of all mesothelioma cases are ever filed with workers' compensation boards. It is believed that meso itself—the short form, meso—is often misdiagnosed as lung cancer, causing the number of deaths from meso to be significantly under-reported. It is estimated that in the coming years, over 2,000 Canadians a year will die from exposure to meso.

In 2015, 175 fatality claims were allowed by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Some 63% of those 175 deaths in 2015 were caused by mesothelioma and related lung cancers.

The numbers are rising. Long-latency illnesses like mesothelioma can involve a delay of many years or even decades. This means that today we're only seeing the result of widespread use in the past. That's why it is important that we move beyond that.

I'm going to skip ahead because I see I'm running out of time, and it's important that I get on to its use.

I would like the Ministry of Labour to create this registry, a public registry of all provincially owned and

leased buildings that contain asbestos. This registry would be linked to the 911 number. The way I envision this is, emergency responders—police, fire, or rescue—when they go to a 911 call, for example, at 111 Wellesley, that would jump up on their iPads in their vehicles, and it would tell them, “Okay, there’s a possibility of asbestos exposure in these buildings. You need to take the proper care when you enter there to do a rescue or to search the building.”

For any type of building that’s going through a regular reconstruction or remodelling, those things are due diligence; those are planned out. It’s the one-offs, the ones where there’s a fire or explosion.

Also, thinking of the registered nurses who were here with us today, those nurses could be exposed—and doctors—when people are taken to the hospital in an ambulance from a case like that. They could be exposed needlessly. So it’s the same case: When that call comes in, they would know that an ambulance is coming from a certain address. They could look that up and take the proper care and do their own due diligence right in the hospital.

I’ve looked at a number of jurisdictions. The province of Saskatchewan has a registry; they’ve had it for a number of years. The provincial Legislature itself in Saskatchewan is listed on there. You can look at every room, every part of that Legislature, and it would tell you what’s in there, who has access to that room, and if there’s the possibility of exposure.

Madam Speaker, a good case, just to wrap it up: In Waterloo, there was a case recently in the paper—everyone has probably seen it. The city of Waterloo had done their due diligence. The city did a study and they knew that there was a water treatment building that had asbestos in the walls. They did the study a number of years ago. Mistakes happen, and there were contractors sent in there to do work. They worked a week in that building, and they found out—they didn’t like the look of some stuff, the product they were seeing coming out of the walls, and sure enough, when they had it tested, it was asbestos. Now, there’s a case where people did their due diligence and people still ended up in there and exposed.

With my idea of a 911 registry, once those buildings are there, then anybody, whether it was a worker on the job or a contractor or subcontractor, could punch that number in and they’d know if there was a possibility of asbestos, or if it had been removed and isolated.

That’s the idea about the 911 registry. I think it’s important that we do this.

I’ll conclude my remarks today. I see I’m running out of time.

Sandy Kinart is the leader of the widows of Chemical Valley. Ms. Kinart’s husband was diagnosed with mesothelioma and died in 2004, along with four other family members—tragic. Ms. Kinart messaged me following the introduction of my bill and said, “Great work, Bob. Let’s get this passed. Mesothelioma takes no prisoners. It only kills.”

Madam Speaker, I’d ask that all members of the Legislature take a look at this important bill, consider supporting it, and move it to committee. I think this bill is very important. I know I’ve talked to the Minister of Labour about it. I know his concerns for workers in the workplace as well as mine—and his government’s. So with your guidance today, the members in this Legislature can help put an end to unnecessary exposure to asbestos in Ontario. There’s no safe use. Please support me in taking action today.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It’s my pleasure to speak on behalf of the people of Hamilton today in support of this bill. I want to thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for bringing it forward.

Asbestos exposure has been identified as the single largest on-the-job killer in Canada. Just last month, the Globe and Mail reported that those deaths continue to rise. Since 1996, almost 5,000 approved death claims have come from asbestos exposure.

Statistics Canada, in recently updated figures, reports that annual deaths from asbestos-related malignancy jumped 60%, from 292 to 467, between 2000 and 2012. Because it takes several years to identify itself—it can take 20 to 40 years for the disease to develop—new cases are also on the rise: 560 new cases in 2012, compared with 276 in 1992. There is no sign of these numbers decreasing.

Make no mistake: This is a horrible way to die. As described by an expert in the field, “You end up with this mass engulfing your lungs and causing them to collapse. You literally die of asphyxiation.” The stories of families who have watched their loved ones go through this are so painful to hear. Anything at all that we can do to resolve this problem, we must do.

I know that the member’s riding of Sarnia–Lambton was hit particularly hard because of the local industry. Again, I want to thank him for bringing this important bill forward. Banning the use, reuse, import and transport or sale of asbestos in Ontario is the right thing to do. Creating a register of all provincially owned or leased buildings containing asbestos is the right thing to do. In fact, it was the right thing to do a long time ago.

Asbestos has been used for thousands of years. Some 4,000 years ago, it was used as wicks in lamps and candles. It was used to embalm the bodies of Egyptian pharaohs, to protect the bodies from deterioration. It is a naturally occurring material, so it shouldn’t surprise us at all that it was being used.

What did surprise me, however, was the following, which came from an article on asbestos. It says, “the hazards of asbestos were recorded as early as Roman times. Both Pliny the Elder and the first-century geographer Strabo noted that workers exposed to asbestos had many health problems. Pliny the Elder recommended that quarry slaves from asbestos mines not be purchased because ‘they die young.’ Lung ailments were common to anyone who worked with asbestos fibres. Pliny the

Elder suggested the use of a respirator made of transparent bladder skin to protect workers from asbestos dust.” That was 2,000 years ago.

When the Industrial Revolution came along, asbestos was used in the manufacture of more than 300 products, including textiles, building materials, insulation and brake linings. Its use continued to increase until it started to decline in the 1970s, when health hazards associated with it could no longer be denied.

The first asbestos-related death was recorded as far back as 1906. The evidence was so strong for insurance companies that they started to increase their premiums and decrease benefits for asbestos workers in 1908. But it took another 60 or 70 years for evidence to be strong enough that the use of asbestos would actually start to decrease. That is the tragedy behind this story: When corporate profits are at stake, the evidence means something. When people’s lives are at stake, evidence gets brushed aside and workers have to fight for decent protection.

There is a good chance that there will be asbestos in any building built before the 1980s or 1990s. But we don’t know where those buildings are. Typically, asbestos isn’t a problem if it is undisturbed, but if people are working on a building, that damage can be done before anyone knows the asbestos is there.

In a news article in 2015, a contractor reported that he had unknowingly exposed himself, his staff, inmates and other correctional officers to asbestos over several days while they were doing work on a correctional facility.

1530

This is where the registry comes in. In 2015, Speaker, I just want to let you know, the federal NDP had called for a national strategy on all government buildings that contained asbestos. That bid, unfortunately, was unsuccessful with the Conservative federal government, and it still continues to drag its feet today under the Liberal federal government. That’s why it’s so important that Ontario takes this stand and makes sure that Ontario is safe when it comes to asbestos. The devastating effects of exposure to asbestos cannot be overstated. It’s well past time for action, and I am so pleased to be able to give my support to this bill today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognise the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s good to see you back in the chair and, as I said the other day, it’s good to be back here in general to see everybody here.

But I really want to start by thanking the member from Sarnia–Lambton. The member and I have worked together on a number of initiatives. I like the practical way that he approaches things and certainly I think he mentioned that we both have a very strong interest and a passion for workers’ health and safety, and that is true. I want to compliment the member for the number of phone calls he and I have, or the number of letters. I like the fact that he’s not afraid to pick up the phone and talk very, very specifically about an issue that may be impacting people in his riding.

I also like the fact that usually it’s not always just a complaint. There’s usually a solution attached to it. There’s usually an offer to work constructively. I think that’s the hallmark of a good politician and I think this bill really shows that hallmark, shows those qualities, as well. I think what he’s doing by asking us to support this bill, which I am very, very happy to do as Minister of Labour, is he’s asking us to take a very practical look at something that’s been done at another level of government but applies so much to the provincial level of government, obviously, as well. We should all applaud in this House the action that has been taken by the federal government in this regard. They have been very clear when it comes to asbestos.

It’s easy to toss blame around when something like this happens, when you have the benefit of hindsight, but you look at some of the pesticides we used in the past, some of the chemicals we used to use in the past. Doctors used to tell you to smoke to calm your nerves. The use of uranium—things, when we look back, we think, “How the heck did we ever do that?”

You realize that at the time you just don’t have that knowledge. But when you do have the knowledge, and we do have the knowledge certainly on asbestos now, that’s the time to act. The MPP for Sarnia–Lambton is asking us to act. It’s a direction that I really support because before you can do something about an issue, you need to know where it all is, you need to be able to measure it, you need to know the magnitude of the problem and you need to set forward a plan that deals with it.

Certainly, as we are going through for a carbon-free economy in the province of Ontario and throughout Canada, that’s going to take an awful lot of work on an awful lot of buildings. Some of those buildings are pretty old buildings and some of those buildings are going to have asbestos in them. As was outlined by a previous speaker, a member of the construction trades who may be called upon to go and work in those buildings should have the knowledge that there is asbestos in the workplace. If we need to go and do some more investigation in that regard, we would be quite happy to do that because we think that’s our role.

What we do in the province of Ontario currently is we provide training for workers; we have the exposure limits that we feel are safe exposures in which to operate; the procedures that you need to use when you are working around or with asbestos; and the type of protective equipment you need to protect yourself when you are working with asbestos.

I wish we didn’t have asbestos in the buildings in the province of Ontario. The fact of the matter is, because of decisions made in the past—apparently 2,000 years ago, in some ways—we do have that asbestos. But we need to deal with it in the best way we can. I think what the member from Sarnia–Lambton is doing in a very constructive way is providing us with direction as to how we might proceed with this. I think he deserves the support of this House—the admiration of this House—for bringing forward such a positive bill.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: Indeed, the member for Sarnia-Lambton deserves enormous credit for bringing forward Bill 88. We want to thank the Minister of Labour for expressing his support for this bill. We hope that means the government members will support it en masse. We hope that it will be sent to a legislative committee. We hope that the committee will deal with the bill and have public hearings, if need be, and report it back to the House for consideration for third reading, and that it not sit too long at the standing committee, as some of our private members' bills have done in the past.

Before I get into the particulars of Bill 88, I want to say how I was pleased and privileged to attend the Lincoln M. Alexander Awards earlier today at the Lieutenant Governor's suite. I was joined by my colleague the member for Dufferin-Caledon, who, of course, is our deputy leader. We were very pleased to see Alexis Kimiko Spieldenner, Tia Okera John and Jordan Cyril Gray receive the Lincoln M. Alexander Award for their significant contribution towards eliminating racial discrimination. Of course, as you'll recall, Madam Speaker, the Ontario Legislature passed legislation to recognize Lincoln Alexander Day on his birthday, January 21. We were very excited that these young people have been recognized by the province of Ontario, and we thank them for that.

Now, of course, back to the member for Sarnia-Lambton: He is one of the most outstanding members of this House, I would say. He's one of the best-liked members across all party lines. He works constructively to address issues and bring forward the issues of concern in his riding and across the province in a very positive way. I think it's not surprising that he's had great success with his private member's bills, many of which have passed into law.

He has served in this House for almost 10 years, since 2007. Our party has been in opposition that whole time and, notwithstanding that fact, many of his private member's bills have been passed by the government, obviously indicating they're good ideas that we can all embrace as political parties across the aisle in this Legislature.

Bill 8, the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012, the Ontario One Call act; Bill 68, the Fighting Hunger with Local Food Act, 2013, adopted in its entirety as an amendment to the Local Food Act; Bill 97, the Natural Gas Superhighway Act, 2013; and Bill 43, the PANDAS/PANS Awareness Day Act, 2016, recognizing October 9 of each year as PANDAS/PANS Awareness Day in Ontario: All of those were good initiatives brought forward by the member for Sarnia-Lambton, and this is another good initiative that I would hope the government will agree to support. Again, this bill is intended to ban the use, reuse, import, transport or sale of asbestos in Ontario. This bill would require that the Ministry of Labour create and maintain a public registry of all provincially owned or leased

buildings which contain asbestos so that we'd have a better understanding of the magnitude of the problem and that we can start to deal with it.

The bill would require that any work in the area of the location of asbestos in a building on the registry be reported to the ministry. The Ministry of Labour would regularly update the registry, and we would hope that would be done, of course. A person who contravened the act, if it were to be passed, would be guilty of an offence and, upon conviction, would be liable to a fine in the amount prescribed by regulations. There would be more details to come, of course, and we'd have to work on that together.

What the bill is all about is recognizing that asbestos exposure is one of the top sources of workplace death in Canada, based on many approved workers' compensation claims in recent years. We recognize that too many families continue to deal with the loss of loved ones due to mesothelioma, and that there is really no safe use for asbestos.

The member, in his remarks, pointed out that it's estimated that mesothelioma will kill more than 2,000 Canadians in 2016. Madam Speaker, I had a very good friend who passed away four or five years ago from that particular illness. I saw him decline, and it was very, very difficult for all of his family and friends. We miss him terribly. But it was as a result of, he believed, asbestos exposure when he was a young man—actually, a teenager—many years before. That was what the doctors and he had come up with in discussions as to how he might have got it.

Since Canada stopped mining asbestos in 2011, asbestos imports have nearly doubled in value between 2011 and 2015 to \$8.2 million. So as we in Canada have stopped mining it because it's dangerous, the imports have increased. So obviously, we have to do something to respond to that particular problem that has emerged in recent years.

1540

Of course, as the member pointed out, it has been reported in the *Globe and Mail* that Stats Canada has said that \$4.3 million of asbestos was imported into Canada in the first eight months of 2016—very, very recent data, obviously illustrating that there is a significant problem that the member seeks to address through Bill 88, and rightly so.

We know that manufactured goods containing asbestos may include friction materials, tubes and pipes, corrugated sheets and panels, paper, millboard, clothing and other chrysotile-based materials.

We know that the member for Guelph, who is currently the Treasury Board president, my colleague Liz Sandals, before she was in cabinet, introduced a couple of private member's bills to address this issue in part. Bill 51, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Brake Pad Standards), was to address the fact that many aftermarket brake components for automobiles that are coming in from other countries and imported here, to be sold and to be installed in our cars, contain asbestos. Even though we

have tried to ban asbestos here, we see more and more asbestos getting into the atmosphere, including through this situation with the brake parts. I'm pretty sure I spoke in favour of the bill, I believe. I certainly recall supporting it when it came to a vote. So I would commend the member for bringing that up as well.

In May of 2015, we understand, Saskatchewan launched a public registry of public buildings containing asbestos. Obviously, they're showing the leadership on this particular issue in terms of having a better understanding of the magnitude and scope of the problem, creating a public registry so that everybody can be informed about it. It's obviously demonstrating that it can be done. It's already being done in Saskatchewan. We need to do it here.

I'm also aware that a federal member of Parliament, Sheri Benson, who I understand is a New Democrat, introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons, Bill C-321, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, to prohibit asbestos.

So there's a lot of work being done on this important issue within the federal Parliament. Certainly, we can do our part here, as members of the provincial Legislature, to express our concern about this issue and, as the Minister of Labour said, follow the leadership of the member for Sarnia-Lambton, who has proposed a very constructive suggestion as to how we can deal with this problem. Let's all get behind it. Let's embrace it.

As I said, if indeed this bill passes second reading here this afternoon, let's get it to a standing committee, and let's not let it sit and gather dust and languish on a shelf somewhere. Let's deal with it. Let's move forward, and let's get it called back into this House, hopefully before this spring sitting ends, and pass it into law—if indeed the government agrees it's a good idea, which it is.

Again, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In conclusion, I commend and congratulate the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is, as always, an honour to rise today, particularly on such an important piece of legislation before us.

I want to commend our colleague the member for Sarnia-Lambton, Bob Bailey, a great guy, who has put forth some wonderful initiatives over the time that I have been able to serve with him.

Speaker, as a former labourer and member of the Labourers' International Union of North America, Local 625, I had the privilege to be trained in asbestos removal, actually. It was offered to me by my union. It was a course that was free to all members. It not only informed me about the dangers of working with asbestos but also the requirements to safely mitigate and remove asbestos from workplaces. Needless to say, I have had first-hand working experience with this. I'm certified to deal and work with asbestos levels of type 1, type 2 and type 3.

It is nasty stuff, as has been spoken about in the House. The nature of asbestos fibres and their effects on

the human body are catastrophic. Any worker that has long-term exposure, or even short-term exposure, to high volumes of asbestos has a higher likelihood, of course, of developing asbestosis and mesothelioma. As has already been alluded to, it is a horrendous way to die.

Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and thank and offer our commitment and our support to families who have lost loved ones through mesothelioma and through asbestosis while on the job. They've gone through terrible tragedies watching their loved ones suffer from this workplace disease. In many instances, they've also had the compounded tragedy and anxiety of having to fight for benefits and fight for coverage when their loved ones have been diagnosed or had questions and suspected that their exposure to asbestos in their workplace led to their illness.

We commit ourselves to that fight. We commit ourselves to amending and fixing the WSIB so that it operates in the fashion that it should, that it supports injured workers and supports workers who have had exposure and are suffering from latent illnesses. We commit ourselves to continuing to fight this government to ensure that that coverage is available. We've done it before. We should continue to do it again.

Again, this is not a novel revelation to the House. We've known for decades that asbestos exposure is detrimental and deadly to workers. It has been labelled as a controlled substance under the Occupational Health and Safety Act for quite some time.

It is interesting that it is a part of a measure coming out of the Progressive Conservative Party, because this is a party that has demonized organized labour for quite some time. When I say that, I mean—with no offence to the member who is offering and has tabled the bill. But look back at the track record of the Progressive Conservative Party both federally and provincially: When these initiatives have come forward to protect workers, it is that party that stands in the way, calling workers and organized labour "obstructionists," sometimes offering that they're lazy and overly regulatory.

Now, this is a regulation. This is going to be a regulation coming out of the Progressive Conservative Party, and that's a good thing. Kudos to you. Wonderful. But it has taken you this long to come to that revelation? New Democrats at the federal level have tried to pass this bill going on years and years. Charlie Angus tried to pass a bill that would ban the exportation of asbestos and essentially kill its market in Canada at the same time, which would have the same effect. But it was the right wing that blocked it.

Now, this is a revelation. I appreciate that. You've come to some conclusion. But let's be frank here: Families have suffered and continue to suffer. Until we enact these types of measures, there will be continued exposure to asbestos.

I support the bill. I don't support the politics that have gotten us here along the way, because we could have done this a lot sooner if we had listened to organized labour, who have been the champions of occupational

health and safety in the province of Ontario and across the country for decades and decades. But here we are today. Let's pass this as quickly as we can. Let's not make it partisan.

I thank the member and congratulate him for putting forward this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Great, Speaker—great memory. It's good to be here today.

I too stand today for a few minutes to recognize Bill 88 from my good friend from Sarnia–Lambton. Let me say off the bat, Speaker, that I wholly support this. I think my comments further along will suggest maybe some things that we need to do.

Let me tell you, on a personal note, Madam Speaker, why I will support this bill. I'm not sure if many in the House would know that my background is in the automotive sector. I was a licensed mechanic for a long time, for quite a while in my younger days. I remember the days when we would replace brakes on cars, something that keeps us safe, and they were made out of asbestos. It was a real good compound, because it did the job. It probably saved a lot of lives. I remember specifying sometimes that I wanted replacement brakes with asbestos on them because, from a safety standpoint, for a car it was a very safe product, unknown to the consequences some decades later. So I had the misfortune of breathing some of that dust, because as you use brakes, if you're familiar at all, the material does turn into dust and it accumulates over the wheels. We would blow it off with air. Touch wood, so far I haven't received any ailments from it. I hope I don't.

1550

From that perspective, as we learn, I think we need to deal with these things. The Minister of Labour mentioned that we did these things without knowing what some of the consequences were down the road, because we just didn't have the knowledge.

One other issue—I'm not trying to deviate from the bill—is that in my hometown, not very far from where I live, there is sort of a swampy area. Well, that was garbage that we dumped there to reclaim land. It was the right thing to do back some 50 years ago. Just down the road, about 20 kilometres from I live, is Zwick's Island in Belleville. It was a garbage dump, virtually. Garbage was dumped in the Bay of Quinte. Now it's park. Nevertheless, that's what we did.

I'm not trying to deviate from the bill. I would say that I will support this. I would acknowledge the work that our federal counterparts are sort of going down in the same direction, I would say to the members. I think that if, hopefully, this will go to committee, we will be able to come with amendments to try to align the two initiatives, both provincially and federally. I say that within the spirit that we debate in this House many times about overburdening, overregulation, red tape and all those things. Any time that we can align what we're doing both

provincially and federally, I think it just makes so much sense.

I would encourage the member—as I said, I will support it—that we need to make sure that we work in tandem with—and it should go both ways, I must say. Because at the end of the day, somebody has to regulate this. Somebody has to have one set of rules, one set of, I guess, a way of controlling it. I would say to the member from Sarnia–Lambton that I think it's a great initiative. Why did it take us this long? I have no idea. But I'm glad that we have the opportunity to debate this today, and hopefully to try to save the health of our citizens, of Ontarians, of Canadians. I would say thank you, and I look forward to supporting this.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really honoured to rise today in the House and congratulate my good friend the MPP from Sarnia–Lambton, MPP Bob Bailey, on his work on this bill.

The MPP from Sarnia–Lambton always puts forward well-thought-out legislation. He has had a lot of success in this House: private member's initiatives passed, like the food bill. The One Call bill, I think, was the first major achievement with his private member's initiatives; and then I think most recently prior to this was the natural gas superhighway that the Minister of the Environment supported and all parties supported. I think this speaks highly to the member.

Knowing MPP Bailey for many, many years, he really does listen to his constituents and the workers in Sarnia–Lambton. That's how this initiative was brought toward, so congratulations. It sounds like all parties are going to support this very important piece of legislation.

I also think the member deserves congratulations because I firmly believe that his private member's bill pushed the federal government and Prime Minister Trudeau to raise this issue. I believe that the Prime Minister campaigned on it, and then there was a gap where nothing was mentioned at all, and because of MPP Bailey, the Prime Minister actually moved forward federally. I think that speaks volumes as well.

This bill bans the use, reuse, import, transport or sale of asbestos in Ontario. This bill compels the Ministry of Labour to create and maintain a public registry of all provincially owned or leased buildings containing asbestos. This bill requires any work in the area of the location of asbestos in a building on the registry to be reported to the ministry. The Minister of Labour will regularly update the registry. And a person who contravenes the act is guilty of an offence and, on conviction, is liable to a fine in an amount prescribed by the regulations.

This is a bill that protects workers in the province of Ontario. As I said, MPP Bailey has a strong relationship with labour in Sarnia, with non-union workers, and he has really, truly listened to those people and deserves a whole lot of credit for doing what's right in the province of Ontario for those workers.

I'm happy to stand and support this legislation, as I will be supporting all the other private members' initiatives today, and want to congratulate MPP Bailey in this work.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to join the other members of this Legislature who have spoken in favour of the bill.

My friend David Crombie has a quote that I always find, the longer I'm in politics, the more truth there is in it, which is, "Everything is connected to everything else." This is very much a health issue, it is very much a workplace safety issue and it's very much an environmental issue, because it's very much a human issue. I'm sure this will appear in his re-election literature, but I again take my hat off to the member for Sarnia-Lambton for his leadership and the consistent and principled positions he's taken. I can't call him by his first name, but I consider the MPP from Sarnia-Lambton a friend.

I just want to comment about the need not just for this legislation—and it's my hope and I would commit to work with the member opposite as a minister of the crown to try and ensure this legislation actually comes into law. I think it deserves to be the law of the land and certainly go to committee for review and revision, if necessary. When I was recently in Sarnia, I was down there looking at another toxic contaminate, benzene, which I know the member is also very concerned about. I was at Aamjiwnaang First Nation. If you need to understand what racism is, you just have to go to Aamjiwnaang. Aamjiwnaang is an indigenous community, a First Nations, surrounded by 35 separate petroleum and chemical refineries. I'm sure the member would probably say that there's no residential neighbourhood in the Sarnia area where likely today would we put 35 refineries around. If that was ever the case, that person would probably not get re-elected.

What is interesting is that we were testing for benzene, because benzene is one of the health problems that comes out of refineries. What was interesting was that while benzene was present in a lot of the First Nations men who had worked in the refineries, the most common problem was not benzene but asbestos. I think the member opposite is quite wisely representing the interests of his community. But it's also important to note that there's a disproportionate amount of asbestos problems amongst the First Nations workers, who were brought in to do this work without really the state-of-the-art protection that we have today. So you have in the First Nations community of Aamjiwnaang a disproportionately high number of indigenous people who were there.

I want to go back to what the member from Essex said, because I thought his point was particularly important: This is not a new problem. Unions and First Nations for decades have been raising this, and there are still parts of Canada, including some of our other provinces, where this stuff is still pulled out of the ground and still traded commercially, which to me is

absolutely insane. For all of those reasons—human rights, environmental health, social justice, human health—this has to be advanced very, very quickly.

The member for Hamilton Mountain spoke very eloquently and I thought really nailed it, if I can use that expression, when she talked about exactly the experience of getting sick. This is one of the most accursed illnesses you can possibly have. It is like drowning in your own lungs.

Let's all commit not just to voting on this today but to supporting the member from Sarnia and getting this legislation passed and into law as quickly as possible.

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

I return back to the member from Sarnia-Lambton to wrap up.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise and thank all of the members—and I don't want to miss anybody here: the members for Elgin-Middlesex-London, Wellington-Halton Hills and Hamilton Mountain; the Minister of Labour; the members for Essex, Northumberland-Quinte West and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex; and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

1600

I wrote down here, "Ontario needs to lead." I think Ontario should be a leader. We've been a leader in a number of other areas, and I think we should lead in this.

I didn't have time to finish it in my original remarks, but what really got me, besides attending all those April 28 mourning events, was, even after we quit mining it after many years of debate, when finally they quit mining it, to find out that we're still importing millions of dollars of asbestos into this country and into this province. I think Minister Sandals said a number of years ago that it was like, at that time, exporting cancer. So if that was true, that we were exporting cancer, now we're importing cancer.

It's important. I thank all of the members for all of their comments, pro and con, and especially both the ministers, the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Labour, for their kind words.

Let's make a commitment. I'll work as hard as I can with them to get this implemented. Let's get it to committee, and we'll get it passed and made into law—with lots of improvements, I'm sure—for the safety of all our workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

LUTTE CONTRE LE RACISME

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 31, standing in the name of Madame Des Rosiers.

Madame Des Rosiers has moved private member's notice of motion number 37. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear some noes.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I heard some nays as well.

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I also see the members are standing. We will vote on this at the end of the other votes.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC
AMENDMENT ACT (SCHOOL BUS
CAMERA SYSTEMS), 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE
(SYSTÈMES PHOTOGRAPHIQUES
RELIÉS AUX AUTOBUS SCOLAIRES)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Nicholls has moved second reading of Bill 94, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member to let the Clerk know which committee this bill will be referred to.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes, social policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, social policy. Agreed? Agreed. Congratulations.

ASBESTOS USE
PROHIBITION ACT, 2017
LOI DE 2017 INTERDISANT
L'UTILISATION DE L'AMIANTE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Bailey has moved second reading of Bill 88, An Act prohibiting the use of asbestos.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried."

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I need to turn to the member. Which committee?

Mr. Robert Bailey: The committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Agreed? Agreed.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES
LUTTE CONTRE LE RACISME

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1603 to 1608.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Members, please take your seats.

Madame Des Rosiers has moved private member's notice of motion number 37. All those in favour please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Munro, Julia
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Murray, Glen R.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Naqvi, Yasir
Bailey, Robert	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Baker, Yvan	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Bisson, Gilles	Hoskins, Eric	Oosterhoff, Sam
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Pettapiece, Randy
Brown, Patrick	Jones, Sylvia	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chiarelli, Bob	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Coe, Lorne	MacLaren, Jack	Sattler, Peggy
Colle, Mike	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Mantha, Michael	Smith, Todd
Damerla, Dipika	Martins, Cristina	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Martow, Gila	Tabuns, Peter
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Matthews, Deborah	Taylor, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	McDonell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Vanthof, John
Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Fife, Catherine	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Norm	Yakubski, John
Fraser, John	Miller, Paul	Yurek, Jeff
French, Jennifer K.	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 81; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

Applause.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MODERNIZING ONTARIO'S MUNICIPAL
LEGISLATION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA MODERNISATION
DE LA LÉGISLATION MUNICIPALE
ONTARIENNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 6, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I see I'll soon be clearing the room.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It is good to be back in the House and speaking again.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Stop the clock. Order.

I'm going to return to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. As I was saying, it is good to be back in the House and speaking on behalf of my constituents in Windsor–Tecumseh.

I had the opportunity late last year, before the winter break, to begin my comments on Bill 68. It's a piece of legislation that ties up a lot of loose ends, but it falls short, in many ways, of putting into law many of the changes municipalities were hoping for.

I think there were five or six pages on what to do with property that has been forfeited, for example, if someone dies without heirs and the assets go to the crown.

I guess, to me, as a former city councillor, one of the biggest changes I see in this bill is the length of time that taxpayers will have before their property is listed as in arrears and subject to forfeiture and a tax sale. It used to be three years; it will now be two. I take it that this is an incentive for people to pay their taxes.

I take it that municipal leaders have told the government—which isn't listening—that they have a problem with unpaid taxes. I know that in Windsor we started working with those in arrears on various alternative options several years ago. Speaker, as you know, I served seven years as a councillor in Windsor. We didn't raise our municipal taxes during those seven years. We didn't do that because we had pretty well the highest unemployment rate in the country of any municipality of our size. People were hurting, and we didn't want to add to their financial burden.

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Let me know if I'm interrupting over there.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. I'm going to call the chamber to order. There's a lot of noise on the government side of the chamber. Please be respectful. The member for Windsor–Tecumseh is speaking on this bill. There's too much conversation. You can take it outside.

I'm going to turn back to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker.

Well, that was then and this is now, and in Windsor now, our unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the province and in the country. We've turned a corner and our municipality is in great shape. But back then, when times were more than tough and people were struggling to pay their tax bill—not that they are not struggling to pay their bills now, Speaker—we developed a payment strategy. We encouraged them to seek alternative financing arrangements and we went out of our way to establish a payment plan that would work for them. Registration was used only as a final option.

In 2016, I think about 100 properties were registered under tax lien. In years before that, we were seeing 200 properties a year. But I'm told by senior officials in the finance department of Windsor city hall that we'll see about 1,450 additional properties come up for registration this year. That number may appear somewhat staggering, but many of those owners have already started making payments of one kind or another.

Unpaid taxes are a debt owing to a municipality, and municipalities, as you know, Speaker, cannot run deficits. If the bill for unpaid taxes is too high, the rest of the taxpayers have a problem. They will be expected to make up the difference, or the money in municipal reserve accounts will be siphoned off and used to cover the unpaid taxes. That money will be replaced, one would hope, at some point in the future, when the taxes are paid, either by the owner in arrears or by the new owner who picks up the property at a tax sale.

But there is no harm in asking why. Why would so many people in Ontario have a problem paying their municipal taxes?

For one thing, I know from speaking with people in my riding, the people who come into my constituency office, it's because of the escalating cost of hydro in recent years under this Liberal government. More and more people are telling me that they are paying more now for their annual hydro bill than they are being charged for their municipal taxes for the entire year.

Juggling your bills, including those for putting food on your table, means you could put off the bill on your property tax for at least three years—it used to be that way; now it's only going to be two. But hydro, as you know, is a different matter. You have to pay for your hydro or they cut off your electricity. I think the number most recently heard in Windsor was 30 customers, that 30 properties in Windsor don't have power because the owners didn't have the money to pay their hydro bill. Now, before you get too alarmed at 30, many of those are vacant properties with absentee owners or landlords. But get this, Speaker: Warning notices have been sent out to thousands of other homeowners, threatening them with the same fate if they don't start paying their hydro bill.

When I say thousands, I'm not exaggerating. Since November, nearly 15,000 customers of EnWin Utilities, a local provider of hydro and water in the Windsor area, were sent warning letters telling customers to make good on their payments. Think about that for a moment: 14,600 warning letters for hydro bills in arrears in one community. You have Ontario's energy minister last fall telling people that no one would be cut off. We have 30 customers cut off now in Windsor and nearly 15,000 other families under threat of cancellation. Where was the leadership of this Liberal government? Where has it been? Who have they been listening to?

If you think about that and the high cost of hydro, the minister's letter does nothing, absolutely nothing, to lower those hydro bills. It's as if the Liberals are putting up a smokescreen, trying to change the channel. I can just see them huddled in a corner: "Too many people in this

province are talking about rising hydro costs. How do we change the channel? Oh, I know. We'll get the local utilities on board. We'll send out a letter to them saying, 'Hey, don't cut off anybody else this winter.'" That didn't work. We had to pass a law, and we did that yesterday with all-party consent on it.

But the costs remain the same. The letter did absolutely nothing to lower the cost of hydro in Ontario. This bill, Bill 68, is a municipal bill, and people in our municipalities, all 444 of them, have issues with the cost of their hydro bills, their energy costs. You used to get three years before you had to pay up on your municipal tax bill; now you'll only have two, despite the government's failure to rein in rising energy costs, forcing homeowners to decide what bills to pay this month when money is so tight for most of us. This is a major change, and my guess is that we'll be hearing more about it at the municipal level.

1620

As I say, money is tight for many of us in Ontario at the moment. Many of the jobs that are available don't come at the same rate as all of the manufacturing jobs we've lost. They don't come with the health and pension benefits that many people used to have. Many of the jobs that have been created are only with part-time hours. So it's understandable to me, I guess, that our municipal partners are feeling the crunch. They must have told the government they needed this change. Of course, my good friends at the municipal level will blame the provincial Liberal government and that's just the way it is.

The bill wasn't shopped around very much, and I understand that. I know the minister will correct me if I'm wrong, but since 1953, the Municipal Act has always been updated every 10 years, and always, always, always there has been a public discussion about those changes. Public hearings were held, delegations made, with presentations in public. I'm told that for the first time ever this was not the case with the amendments to this bill. For some reason, I'm told, they accepted written submissions. Of course, my friends the usual suspects in the associations that are involved with municipal government, in one way, shape or another, were brought in and asked for input, and that is a good thing. But as far as Joe and Josephine Public, they were nowhere to be seen. Their views were not asked for. They were not recruited to tell the government what opinions they may have on the way municipal governments do their business. That is just too bad, because if you go to any Tim Hortons, go to any barbershop, go to a hockey rink, municipal taxpayers have opinions and they don't mind sharing them.

Just ask a group of taxpayers I've heard from up in Oshawa. They have been hounding their mayor and councillors for years. They've complained to the provincial Ombudsman, various and previous Ministers of Municipal Affairs, the OPP anti-rackets squad, the Attorney General, their local MPP and others, including myself. Their basic complaint is that there has been a failing framework of accountability within the Municipal

Act. They have some ideas on this, but they were never given the opportunity to address their issues under this review process. It's not as though no one within the bureaucracy didn't know about these folks, and others, who would have liked to have had a say.

But this private consultation on the bill—by the way, it was held over a few weeks, a small window in the summer, when the Pan and Parapan Am Games were being held. I know you remember those games, Speaker—busy times in the Toronto area. But there was little or no media coverage about the bill and the review because the cameras were all pointed in another direction. Now, it can be argued, especially by a critic for municipal affairs, that the City of Toronto Act and the Ontario Municipal Act are among the most significant pieces of legislation, affecting the lives of all of us here in our province. Municipalities are still struggling to deal with the downloading forced on them by the Mike Harris Conservative government—\$3 billion in service costs dumped onto the municipal laps and forced onto the municipal tax base. That started the landslide that turned Ontario into a have-not province. Municipal revenue streams—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay.

I'm going to return to the member for Windsor-Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It limits their ability to deliver downloaded services. This leads to what I see as a failure in the bill. The Wynne Liberals missed a golden opportunity here to establish a level playing field for all 444 municipalities in Ontario. They could have given them the ability, as they did for the city of Toronto, for more taxing options. Nobody likes to pay taxes. I don't like to pay taxes. Nobody wants to pay even more taxes, especially those of us who earn less than a Liberal cabinet minister in Ontario. But as a senior, mature order of government, municipalities know best what to charge and how to levy that tax in the best interest of their municipal taxpayers. If they screw it up, if they overcharge, if they lose the confidence of the ratepayers, they won't be re-elected.

I mean, we only have to look across the aisle for evidence of that. Hydro rates will be the albatross of the Wynne Liberal government. That's not me saying that. The pollsters are saying that. I know the pollsters have been wrong before and the election is still 15 months away, but I'm just saying.

Selling our publicly owned electricity system was a major mistake. Not stopping the sale in the face of public opposition was another major miscalculation on the Premier's part. Polls show way more than 80% of the people in Ontario are opposed to selling off our publicly owned hydro system. I say, if the polls are right and they don't change much at all, the Premier's political coattails won't be long enough for many members of the class of 2014 who came into office when the people had a different view of the Premier. She has been a major disappointment to many of us. You can fool some of the

people some of the time, Speaker, and maybe fool a few people all of the time, but you won't fool everyone in Ontario the next time. You will not convince voters that selling Hydro has been in their best interests.

The Financial Accountability Officer has told us it's short-term gain for long-term financial pain. We'll lose hundreds of millions of dollars that used to come back to the taxpayers. That money will now go to the profits in the pockets of the private investors, the friends of the Liberal Party who lined up to buy those shares in Hydro One.

With a couple of changes, this bill could have helped the municipal tax base in Ontario. AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, has called for a level playing field. They want equal treatment. They want the taxing powers available in the City of Toronto Act. They want to be able to decide for themselves how to pay for their own municipal services. Not every municipality would choose to do so. A few might, but having that option is key.

The City of Toronto Act allows for an alcoholic beverage tax. It allows for an entertainment and amusement tax. Parking levies could range from 50 cents a day for each spot to as much as \$1.50. Toronto has the ability to tax tobacco between 1% and 10%. Obviously few, if any, other municipalities in Ontario would choose to hit the taxpayer with all of those, but that's not the point. They want the option to enact any of them as they see fit. Why is Toronto different? Why is Toronto treated differently? Why can't other Ontario municipalities, should they choose, raise more money to pay for their ever-increasing costs of municipal services, other than from just their property tax?

Speaker, municipal politicians believe the Liberals missed their chance on this one. They could have slipped that in here as easy as pie.

Okay, let's turn from what is not in here to what is in here. And—listen to this, you guys—there are some good things in here, some very good things in here. See? They're not listening, Speaker. No applause. They couldn't give a rat's—never mind.

Let's talk about integrity for a moment. We all know what that is. Some of us even claim to have a fleeting relationship with it. Bill 68 would do a couple of things. It requires municipalities which have yet to do so to establish codes of conduct for council members and for those who serve on the various local boards and committees. It also requires municipalities which haven't done so to hire or provide access to an integrity commissioner already in the employ of another municipality. These are good recommendations—very good, as a matter of fact, in my humble opinion.

I was surprised to learn that many municipal councils are behind the times on this. I just took it for granted, I guess, because I was on city council in Windsor. We had one. We had a code of conduct. We used the services of an integrity commissioner—and we hired our own, Dr. Bruce Elman, who teaches law at the University of

Windsor. In fact, he's a former dean of law. He knows what he's doing, and he does it well.

Every member in this House answers to an integrity commissioner at the provincial level. The existing municipal integrity commissioners will have some of their powers expanded. They'll be doing work on code-of-conduct provisions, as well as the conflict-of-interest act. They'll be working with municipalities on procedures for ethical behaviour, and there will be an educational component to their work as well.

1630

I do have one issue with this section of the legislation, however. To me, it's a very serious oversight that needs correction before this bill gets passed into law. For some reason, this bill allows 180 days as the period of time for when a complaint is launched against a councillor until the case has to be resolved. That is way too much time. Why not 30 days, or even 60? Maybe 90 at the most, but not six months. People's political reputations are on the line. There will be uncertainty in the community, rumours will swirl, and issues can be blown far out of proportion. The time limit needs to be shortened dramatically.

There's another thing that came to my mind after I talked to the ministry's staff about this. I'll label it under "conspiracy theories," Speaker. Let's just pretend for a moment that someone wants to disparage a mayor's reputation—or a councillor's, for that matter—in the weeks heading into a municipal election. A bogus complaint gets filed, word leaks out that this complaint is being investigated, and all of a sudden, people aren't so sure anymore about who to vote for. An investigation may eventually clear the mayor's name or the councillor's name or the candidate for office, but by then it could be far too late. The election could be over. Maybe this bill could be improved if no complaints were accepted within so many days of an election, and/or all complaints about a conflict of interest, a code-of-conduct infraction or anything else filed with an integrity commissioner have to be resolved before the deadline for nominations—whatever, but let's put our heads together on this to avoid unnecessary aggravation.

This is serious stuff, Speaker. If the integrity commissioner finds that there is enough evidence to take the case to a judge, the person being charged could face anything from a simple reprimand to a suspension of pay for up to 90 days. Heck, the judge could even declare the seat vacant and disqualify the member from running again for a period of up to seven years. There's also a provision in there for financial restitution if the person filing the claim suffered a loss of some kind of personal financial gain during that period. So the act has to be taken seriously.

There's also a section in here to force municipalities to develop policies on the relationship between members of council and the office's employees of that municipality. This may or may not be related to the news coming out of city hall in Sarnia in recent months. There's a major controversy over there in the Chemical Valley. My friend the mayor, Mike Bradley, is at the centre of it all. Several

senior administrators, all of them women, launched a formal complaint against the way the mayor treated them. They said he was disrespectful. They said he demeaned them in front of others. They said he publicly questioned their competence. There were lots of accusations, and most of them were upheld. City council took disciplinary action against the mayor. He was locked out of city hall, unless it was between Monday and Friday and 9 to 5. There was even talk of the city opening up an office for him away from city hall altogether. That would limit his interactions with the female city administrator and other female department heads. I've been told council even refused to allow the mayor access to the employees' home addresses when he wanted to send everyone Christmas cards this year, as he has always done.

It's not a good situation. The community is divided on what's happening there because the mayor enjoys widespread popularity. He's been mayor since 1988, 28 years, which makes him the second-longest serving mayor in Ontario after Gord Krantz in Milton. He's been on council since 1965 and mayor since 1980.

This bill calls on municipal leaders to establish guidelines and principles for the professional interaction between elected and administrative officials in their communities. That's an issue in Waterloo as well that will be taken care of under this bill, because currently there's an old law still on the books that dates back to the days when the good old boys ran everything in Ontario—the “bad old days,” I should say. It's never been much of an issue until now, but it is high time that it is corrected.

This bill will see that there will be a new policy for pregnancy and parental leaves that will prevent a councillor's seat from being declared vacant if they've missed too many meetings in a row because they were taking care of a newborn infant. It doesn't matter if the baby was adopted, parental leave is given regardless, and the seat is not declared vacant, as it would have been under the old rules in many municipalities. Henceforth, you'll be able to miss meetings for up to 20 weeks, if you so choose. I compliment the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, who first raised this with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Then the member from Kitchener Centre jumped on board, and now we see it as part of this overdue change in the new municipal bill.

By the way, Speaker, for your information, I just heard a few weeks ago that members of Parliament in Ottawa are allowed to bring their newborn babies into the chamber and can breastfeed their babies at their chair, should they so choose—and they have, I'm told. Parliament is also renovating a room or two just outside the chamber for a similar purpose or for a changing room.

Changing gears—pardon the pun—there's another part of this bill that may concern municipal politicians who are in a lower-tier or upper-tier regional government arrangement. After the next municipal election, in 2018, there will be a mandatory review—as there will be after every second election after the next one—to determine how many members, based on representation by population, should be on the lower- and upper-tier governments

within the region. I see nothing wrong with periodic reviews. Changing demographics should be recognized, if one area of the region is gaining residents while another is not growing. The growth areas should have more elected representatives.

That's what we're doing here, as you know, in the Legislature. We're adding 15 new seats. Most of them will be in the greater Toronto area because this is the growth area of the province. As I understand it, we'll be adding a seat in the north as well because of the great size of the ridings up there. The population may not be growing up there, but it will make it easier for the elected MPPs to get around their ridings and bring back the voices of their residents here to Queen's Park. That is a bonus for democracy. Some of those northern ridings are the same size as or larger than some European countries. I fully support the concept for more ridings in the north.

Speaker, as you know, for the most part, until now, many citizens in Ontario were approaching the provincial Ombudsman with complaints about secret or private municipal council meetings. Issues were being discussed behind closed doors, without notice, and without the public being allowed to listen to those discussions. The new Integrity Commissioner will be able to handle those complaints, and to make the job easier, this bill will change the definition of what constitutes a meeting. Henceforth, “meeting” means “any regular, special or other meeting of a council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them, where,

“(a) a quorum of members is present, and

“(b) members discuss or otherwise deal with any matter in a way that materially advances the business or decision-making of the council, local board or committee.”

Nothing changes in what can be discussed in a closed meeting; in a nutshell, matters of a legal nature, matters that deal with personnel issues, property or collective bargaining—did I miss anything, Raymond? It's all there, Lorne? I covered it? Okay. Now, this doesn't mean a few councillors can't get together for a beer at a “buy one, get the second one free” chicken wings offer before or after a regular council meeting, but they can't have a quorum of council at the table and they can't cut deals on future votes.

In case a member of council can't make it to a regular meeting, this bill will allow that person to phone in or to partake electronically—as they can now under the Education Act but not under the existing Municipal Act—but under this act that member cannot be counted towards quorum and that person cannot vote on the matters up for discussion.

There's also a provision in here that would allow a member from a lower-tier municipality to be subbed into a regional council meeting if the person normally scheduled to take part at the regional level is unavailable. I understand that that's been an issue in some regions before now, but that will be covered under this bill as well.

Again, these are minor changes that make a lot of sense and don't come at a cost to democracy.

As the critic for municipal affairs, I met a year or so ago with delegations from the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, ROMA—I missed this year’s meeting, just so you know, Speaker. But back then, the chair of ROMA, Ron Holman, the mayor of Rideau Lakes, was very passionate—you’ll remember this, Lou—in saying that he needed support to make a change in the way municipalities could invest some of their reserve funds. Until now, the rules were very tight and they were costing smaller municipalities money because they couldn’t invest in the same securities as their political cousins. This bill will allow for more flexibility and allow municipalities to invest wisely and earn more interest on money they don’t need right away.

1640

Prudent investing by strict standards and regulations: This isn’t taking municipal funds and investing in Lotto Max or Lotto 6/49 tickets. But once a bylaw is passed, municipal leaders could exercise care, skill, diligence and judgment that a prudent investor would exercise in making such an investment.

I went so fast in the beginning, I’m almost running out of things to say.

Mrs. Gila Martow: We won’t complain.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Nobody is going to complain on a Thursday afternoon? If I wasn’t trying to override all of the hubbub earlier, Speaker—nice to see you in the chair, sir.

This bill will also allow municipalities to team up with a partner municipality and invest as part of a group in order to qualify for a higher return. It will also encourage municipal leaders to do more long-range planning and to think more about energy conservation and climate change. That gets us into the possibility of more living walls, green roofs and alternative roof surfaces.

This bill also makes it a point to require municipalities to adopt policies mandating that more attention be given to natural vegetation and our local tree canopies. As we all know, trees are the lungs of the earth. They clean our air. As a former member and chair of the Essex Region Conservation Authority, I am all for the planting of more trees. I know we passed a private member’s bill last year that we want to plant millions of trees this year as part of the Ontario 150 ceremonies.

I’ve never missed an opportunity to help out in our area when we’ve celebrated Earth Day or joined with outside partners while planting trees. Trees are so important. This bill pays respect to the importance of trees in our everyday lives.

Speaker, you and I have heard a lot in this chamber about community hubs. This bill aspires to get more municipalities thinking of integrated planning. This may sound a little bit bureaucratic or, let me say, like words written by a well-meaning bureaucrat, but the bill reads, “This proposed amendment aligns with the government’s commitment to implement the community hubs strategic framework and action plan’s recommendation to ‘require integrated planning to ensure client-focused service delivery regardless of jurisdictional boundaries’ by

providing a mechanism to support municipal roles in local integrated planning, if appropriate.”

Speaker, I’m not sure about you, but I think that means that mayors and councillors will work with school trustees on plans to offer community services in buildings that might otherwise remain empty when no longer required for their original purpose. I’m not a bureaucrat. I don’t know how to speak as they do. I don’t get paid by the word. I’m not sure how it all works out. But it seems a convoluted way to say what I think it means, if my interpretation is correct.

There’s a lot of good stuff in this bill, and I commend the minister for bringing it forth—and I wait for the applause from the other side.

Applause.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oh, they were listening, Speaker.

I also want to commend the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for his previous work on the bill as well.

There are still a lot of issues that municipalities have with this government. For example, just this afternoon, I received a communication from Tay Valley township and from Head, Clara and Maria up around Stonecliffe. They’ve got a huge issue, as a municipality, on new regulations that they’re trying to wrestle with. Apparently—it must be under the environment minister, I guess—the legislation is extremely arbitrary. It fails to take many, many variables into consideration, least of all the financial burden on rural Ontario seniors.

The resolution, Speaker, is because the government now wants it mandatory that every home in rural areas in the province of Ontario, if they’re on a septic system, regardless of the level of whatever is in that septic bed, will have to pump it out—a mandatory pump-out regardless of what’s in there—every five years. Now, if you have an old gentleman or an older lady in a small home in rural Ontario on a septic system living by himself or herself, I’m not sure that they’re going to plug up the septic bed every five years. And I’m not sure where we expect them to get the money from to pay for the bailout.

What the municipalities are concerned about is, what cost is this burden going to put on municipalities who have to find someplace to dump this stuff and store this stuff? I mean, we, the government, the Legislature, come up with these ideas. Someone in the bureaucracy says, “This is a good idea. Let’s make it happen.” It comes here; it gets passed. We send out the letters to the municipalities informing them that from now on, regardless of the need, you’re going to have to mandate and regulate, and you’re going to have to keep records, good records, saying that you’ve done so, and go up to every home in rural Ontario on a septic bed, and say, “Oh, your five years is up. Call in somebody. You’ve got to get pumped out.” Now, that home could have been vacant for four years, but it doesn’t matter.

You wonder why some people are upset with the government. Let me just say that they passed a resolution on this. They’ve circulated it around the province, and it says:

“Whereas the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has proposed a change to the building code, B-08-09-03, requiring mandatory five year septic tank pump out and records retention by the owner;

“And whereas that same change requires municipalities to administer and enforce this change;

“And whereas the change document fails to identify the administrative costs to municipalities;

“And whereas the change document fails to identify any transfer of provincial funding to offset these downloaded costs;

“And whereas many municipalities already have bylaws to regulate septic systems especially near waterways;

“And whereas the majority of homeowners pump out their septic tanks on a regular basis whether regulated to or not;

“And whereas there are many more important issues on which to spend taxpayers’ money than ‘enhancing’ maintenance on existing functioning systems;

“And whereas adequate legislation already exists to correct malfunctioning systems;

“And whereas Premier Wynne stated on Monday, January 30, 2017 at the ROMA conference that the province recognizes that ‘one size fits all’ solutions do not always work in rural Ontario;

“Therefore be it resolved that the council of the united townships of Head, Clara, and Maria”—this is just one of the things that came from my office from this issue that’s been raised up in Tay Valley—“does hereby request the Honourable Bill Mauro, Minister of Municipal Affairs, to rescind proposed building code change B-08-09-03;

“And further that a copy of this resolution is sent to the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario, the Honourable Bill Mauro, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr. Patrick Brown, leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Ms. Andrea Horwath, leader of the New Democratic Party, and all members of provincial Parliament in the province of Ontario.” So I imagine we all got one of these today.

“And further that a copy of this resolution is sent to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA), the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM), and to all Ontario municipal mayors for consideration.” That’s from Head, Clara and Maria.

1650

The one from Tay Valley, a different letter, is to Mr. Ballard, expressing “strong opposition to proposed Ontario building code change B-08-09-03 which would require septic systems to be inspected every five years. The township agrees that inspecting septic systems and regular pumping maintenance are reasonable and desirable goals. In fact the township has a mandatory septic inspection program for cottage properties on seven of its lakes whose lake association members have requested this program.

“However, Tay Valley township council is concerned that five years is an arbitrary target. There is also concern

that a simple pump-out does not address maintenance issues. Five-year pump-outs will simply result in moving sewage from one location to another. The alternative of testing the tanks and judging the level of sludge present would result in a more evidence-based approach reflecting actual conditions. It should include inspection of the septic system components (e.g., filters and baffles) which would address nutrient management, therefore, the longevity of the system would increase as the leaching field would be maintained.

“Tay Valley township council has many questions about implementation:

“—Where will the septage be taken for disposal?

“—Where is there capacity for disposal?

“—Will Tay Valley township have to create capacity?

“—Has the Ministry of Housing or Ministry of Environment and Climate Change done a capacity analysis for septage treatment by some type of catchment area, e.g. Lanark county or other smaller area?

“—Who will bear the costs? There are cost implications for residents. What happens when people can’t afford the pump out? Will grants or loans be available?

“—Will infrastructure funding from the province for package plants (communal septic systems)?

“There are also cost implications for municipalities and/or the septic office or public health unit to verify pumping is occurring. Unless MAH—the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing—“creates an app for verification by the pumpers to send to the townships, the Mississippi-Rideau Septic System Office estimates it will require at least one-half a full-time-equivalent position to monitor the paperwork and track or enforce compliance. Money spent on tracking compliance would be better spent as a no-interest loan to replace septic tanks or pay for the pump-out.

“In summary, the township is opposed to mandatory septic pump-outs on a five-year arbitrary time frame rather than an evidence-based approach through testing sludge levels. The township is further opposed to mandatory septic pump-outs until a more comprehensive implementation strategy has been identified by the province and agreed to by the township.”

That is signed by Keith Kerr, the reeve of Tay Valley township.

As I said previously, there are a lot of good things in the bill and I look forward to supporting it. But it needs enhancement; it needs improvement. As I say, some of the time frames for when people launch complaints need to be shortened so we can have a resolution and they’re not just left out there hanging forever.

At the same time, we put in issues such as the septic tank pump-outs. When we do that, it just adds to the burden of the cost to the local taxpayer. Nobody in this House would be surprised to know that people in Ontario are struggling to pay their existing bills. Now we’re going to have a regulation dreamed up by somebody in a corner office somewhere, who sat back in downtown Toronto, where there is no septic system, and said, “You know, up north, up in cottage country—I was up there as

a kid one time, and there was a septic bed. I don't know how often my grandfather used to have it pumped out. But you know what? I bet you five years is a good time frame for people to have to pump out their septic beds. I don't even know the cost of what that would be, and I don't know where you would put all that stuff once every home on a septic system in Ontario is pumped out, but, hey, that's not my worry. I'm not going to pay for it."

These regulations come in, they get handed out, it gets downloaded, and other costs download onto municipalities, and we hear about it. Everyone in this Legislature gets notifications. I'm sure the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has a pile of these on his desk already because I just started getting them myself.

So how do we respond, Speaker? When we debate changes to a Municipal Act, how do we bring to the bureaucracy's attention that some of the things they do have an impact on our pocketbooks—and not just those of us in this chamber but everyone in Ontario and, in this case, everyone in rural Ontario on a septic system? Every five years from now on, let alone—you might be doing it every three years currently. You might be managing your septic bed based on what's in there, how many people are in the home, how often it's used. But even for those homes, as I mentioned, there could be a vacant property up there for a couple of years and maybe one person moves into it, and there's no way that that bed is going to be full in five years, and yet the regulations are now out there that, if we don't make a change, say, "Sorry, pal, take it out of your wallet." Don't forget to pay your hydro bill. Don't forget to pay your property tax. Don't forget to try and afford gasoline for the vehicle because you're in rural Ontario and you've got to travel quite a bit of distance to get to a hospital if it's still open, a library if it's still open or take your kid to school if the school is still open in rural Ontario, which is becoming more and more of an issue. But we're going to impose this financial burden on you because, here in downtown Toronto, we think it's a good idea.

That's not the way a government that should be thinking about customer service, should be passing laws, should be making regulations, should be making changes without consultation with the people who are going to be impacted.

As I said before, the impact of this bill—there was no real public consultation for the first time ever. There was no public consultation on this at all, and that is a shame. As I mentioned, there's a whole bunch of people up around Oshawa who really wanted to have input on this and they missed their opportunity. They've been letting me know, as the critic. They've been letting Ms. French know, as the local MPP, their mayor, their councillor, the Attorney General, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ombudsman. They've gone to everybody, saying, "Look, we've got a problem in our municipality, and it's not getting fixed. We want some accountability brought in, and nobody's listening." They wanted that opportunity to appear before the committee and say, "This is what's going on." It may not be what

they say it is, but they wanted the opportunity to voice their opinion. They wanted someone to listen, and nobody has given them that courtesy.

I just use those as two examples of how this bill could have been improved and how, when we do these bills, we should be thinking about the people in rural Ontario as much as the people in downtown Toronto. We should be thinking of what we do here having a direct impact on the pocketbooks, the bank accounts and the budgets of the people that we're here to support. They supported us to get here, and we want to support them in their everyday lives and the cost of living in their everyday lives. Instead, week after week, month after month, year after year, their costs are going up. Their income is not necessarily going up. If anything, that income stagnated quite a while ago, but yet we keep imposing cost after cost, regulation after regulation, and then we download a lot of what we do onto municipalities who are then expected to go out and enforce the stuff that we put into the legislation that we discuss in this House.

I know I've used up pretty well most of my time this afternoon. I want to thank you for listening so attentively, and my members over here and over here who finally quieted down. I finally got a few points out. Thank you for your time, Speaker.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now open the floor for questions and comments.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the member for the comments he made. I have a lot of respect for this member. We work on some committees together. We travel together. We probably party a little bit together, I would say. He does make some good points. I'm gathering from his comments, although he might not have agreed initially—I was listening intently, and I gather from his comments in general that he's supportive of the legislation. Yes, it needs some tweaking, and that's why we go through this process. That's why when it goes to committee, we have an opportunity to listen to folks. He brings up some good points. He's perfectly right when he says that it's not about Toronto, that it's not about Ottawa; it has to be about Ontario in general, whether it's rural, urban, whatever.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, part of my mandate from the Premier and the minister is, coming from a rural riding, that I also keep a rural lens as we do things in this House.

Frankly, there are a lot of things that happen in this House, and it's pretty hard sometimes to keep a close eye on everything, but we're trying our best.

The comments that the member made—I take those with real interest. I can assure the member, or the House, that I will have those discussions with the minister and see where we can go. That's no different, frankly, than when we listen to people when they come to committee—that we take those comments and suggestions they make very, very seriously.

I want to thank the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I thank the honourable member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise and give my comments on Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act.

We heard from the member from Windsor West. He gets a little hoarse, from all of his years, I believe, on the radio or knocking on doors. He spoke very elegantly and eloquently about consulting our municipal partners.

As the member of provincial Parliament for Thornhill, I feel that oftentimes we're not working that well or that closely with our municipal partners or really understanding some of the challenges that they have. By constantly imposing our views on municipalities, I don't know that we're doing the public, who we're supposed to be serving, any big favours. We see the municipalities that are struggling with wind turbines. It's very easy for people in a big urban centre to make all kinds of rules, adding gas tax, such that we don't understand the repercussions in rural Ontario, where there isn't public transit, where they have a lot of challenges with snow clearing that we don't face down here in Toronto.

I would invite everybody to speak to some of the municipalities that you don't often speak to and find out what they feel about this bill so that you can share your opinions and send a letter to the minister.

For example, we heard about imposing a five-year time frame on cleaning out septic systems. Some houses in rural Ontario—and people even in downtown Toronto have cottages. They're not using it for the whole year, and maybe five years is completely unnecessary and a waste of resources.

Let's support our municipal partners as much as we can. Let's listen to them, and let's get public consultation on this bill as much as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): For further questions and comments, I now turn to the MPP for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a pleasure for me to rise and offer some comments on the remarks from my colleague the member for Windsor–Tecumseh. Certainly, he has been able to channel his expertise and experience as a municipal councillor in his community to offer some really valuable feedback on this legislation that the government has brought forward. As he stated, certainly, the NDP caucus supports this legislation. Why wouldn't we? There's really not a lot in here to either enthusiastically support or oppose. For a government that talks about wanting to work closely with municipal partners and wanting to consult, we didn't really see a very extensive consultation process that went into the making of this bill. There was a posting on a web page for a few months, a call for people to email submissions, but there was not the kind of comprehensive consultation that one would have hoped would take place when you're talking about redesigning—modernizing—Ontario's municipal legislation act.

I did want to highlight two provisions of the bill that I think are particularly important. The first is requiring municipalities to adopt a policy to allow leaves due to pregnancy. This is critical if we are going to get more women running for municipal office. The second is around prescribing actions for municipalities to implement community hubs. This is a good start. Much, much more is needed. We know that OPSBA, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, in a recent GSN submission to the government, talked about the need for proactive, extensive preplanning and multi-year budget commitments to really help enable the flourishing of community hubs—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to be able to speak for a couple of minutes to Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act.

I just wanted to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for his comments. In fact, a number of us were listening and some of us were even making notes. So thank you for what you had to say.

There are a number of key things in here. I speak to them as a former municipal councillor myself and someone who, as a journalist, covered many municipal councils in regions across Ontario.

A couple of the highlights right off the bat: Ensure that locally elected officials can take a pregnancy or parental leave of 20 weeks. Well, Speaker, that is such a no-brainer in 2017. I certainly appreciate the member for Kitchener Centre for introducing that bill.

One of the other things that my town was active in was that as a small little community, we went out on a limb: We were one of the first municipal governments in Ontario to hire our own integrity commissioner. In fact, the last integrity commissioner we had was none other than the former MPP from this jurisdiction, David Tsubouchi, who provided some really good service. There was some push-back about the cost of an integrity commissioner to a small community like Aurora, but, quite frankly, the cost of not having an integrity commissioner was much higher than having an integrity commissioner, because we went to him to seek advice before we got into trouble, rather than him helping us find our way out of trouble, and I would say that about any integrity commissioner.

Moving along: the whole concept of what defines a meeting. I'm glad we're tightening that up. That's so important.

Finally, allowing municipalities greater depth in terms of how they finance their infrastructure and the services that they need is important.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return back to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh to wrap up.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I want to thank the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Thornhill and London West, and of course the Minister of Housing and poverty reduction. This bill is a good bill; it needs some tweaking, but it is a good bill. Earlier, I commended the

minister and the previous minister for bringing this forward.

We talked about ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. All parties met with ROMA delegations a few weeks ago. Yet we still hear from people that were at those meetings and are quoting the Premier that “one size doesn’t fit all.” She’s aware of that, yet we keep making regulations from here and sending it out that one size does fit all. That has to change.

Next week, it’s the Ontario Good Roads Association. Again, we’re going to hear from them what they always say to us, yet nothing gets done by way of legislation on the points that they raise—that is, asset management, standardization. It sounds so simple when you’re trying to get your all your ducks in a row: How many miles of road do you own? What is the definition of a shoulder? How long is a shoulder? What is the measurement stick on a shoulder of a road? In some municipalities, it may be this, and in another, that. But there is no clear definition coming from the province. When you put together your asset management plan, your shoulder of your road—the road is going to be 66 feet or whatever it is; your shoulder does or does not fall within that.

1710

The Good Roads Association can’t get answers from the government on things like that, and it seems like a no-brainer. It really does. We listen to all of these delegations year after year, and yet the government hasn’t enacted the things that they bring forward.

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and also the minister responsible for small business.

It is a pleasure to stand up this afternoon in the House to speak to Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario’s Municipal Legislation Act. When I look around this chamber, there are many members here who are former municipal elected officials, on all sides of the House. There is a lot of knowledge and wisdom that is brought to these debates about the reality of how municipalities do their business day in and day out, how provincial legislation can help that process and how it sometimes hinders. That’s why this piece of legislation is so important, because it is modernizing the way municipalities in this province will be operating.

There are a number of things from which the city of Toronto benefited through the City of Toronto Act. I know that elected officials across the province were telling the government, “Why did just Toronto get those powers and abilities? We would like them too.” This legislation takes a number of steps forward to ensuring that some of the additional powers which the city of Toronto received will now be conferred upon municipalities across the province. That is a good thing. We’re creating a level playing field here, so that municipal government everywhere in the province is accountable and well-managed and has clear rules on how it’s supposed to operate.

This legislation contains a number of really important advancements. I will speak about perhaps the least controversial, the most simple and, in some ways, one of the most meaningful ones that are contained in the bill: ensuring that elected officials at the municipal level can get maternity leave or paternity leave or parental leave of up to 20 weeks. How incredibly important is that?

Madam Speaker, for a woman who is elected to municipal council, the potential prospect that she could lose her seat if she missed three consecutive meetings while she was pregnant or after having given birth is an incredible burden and an incredible disincentive for child-bearing-age women to participate in that process. That’s an impediment that, in this day and age, should not exist, and we’re removing it.

It will extend to fathers, who will be able to take a parental leave as well to spend time with their newborn child and with their family. It’s very important to all of us who have served at the municipal level. We’re always challenged about how to balance work and home life. This is a very important and meaningful reform, and one which I’m proud we’re bringing forward. I know the member from Kitchener had a private members’ bill on this topic, and I’m so incredibly proud of her. She made all of us aware of that gap. I’m very proud of supporting it.

This bill also deals with a number of very important accountability issues at the municipal level. As the Minister of Housing just mentioned, the ability of municipalities to have integrity commissioners to provide that mechanism both to the elected officials to have a place to seek advice on how to conduct themselves in accordance with the law, but also to ensure that the public has the ability to hold their elected officials to account not just at the ballot box, but in the time in-between. Certainly, in the city of Toronto, we’re all very aware of the very important role that the integrity commissioner played during the previous term of council, where the integrity commissioner found a number of violations of the code of conduct, and held certain members of council to account.

This legislation, of course, does recognize that it would not be one-size-fits-all across the province. Every council could adopt a code of conduct which is appropriate for their circumstances. Councils can choose whether to have their own integrity commissioner, to pool that with neighbouring municipalities or to simply hire an individual to fulfill that role as necessary. That is good legislation for all municipalities in this province because it ensures accountability while maintaining flexibility and independence for those municipalities.

This legislation is also going to make it easier for municipalities to invest their funds in a variety of ways which might provide better returns, might fit their investment needs better and might be able to provide more resources for their infrastructure needs by allowing them to invest in a broader number of financial instruments. Right now, most municipalities have a very narrow type of investment that they can invest in. This is going to

open that up, provided they've done their homework. Again, it's not going to impose this on any municipality; it's simply going to give municipalities additional options. Again, it's an example of this government listening to our friends at AMO, ROMA, NOMA and FONOM, and giving them flexibility, giving them more ability to decide on their own what works best for them.

I know this bill is also going to clarify what constitutes a meeting of councillors, which has often caused some problems when groups of councillors have gotten together. Is this actually a meeting? Is this a legal meeting? Is there a repercussion to a group of us meeting together? It sets out very clearly what is a meeting. A meeting constitutes quorum. A meeting means that those councillors are actively promoting the business of the municipality, moving it forward. It clears up some ambiguity and will make it easier for elected officials to know when they're having a formal meeting and when they, appropriately, sometimes have less formal meetings as smaller groups. That's important for elected officials to know, especially with the various accountability measures that are being put in at the same time.

This bill is also going to provide municipalities the ability to enact more bylaws around policies to ensure that climate change is being mitigated in their municipality. In the city of Toronto, I was very proud, as chair of the planning and growth committee, to help bring forward green roof bylaws and other green construction bylaws. Those were powers that the city of Toronto has that other municipalities don't have as broadly. This bill is going to allow municipalities, again, to have more flexibility to enact bylaws that address new challenges that they find, and give them some direction about where they should be addressing their efforts.

Madam Speaker, all of this is within the context of a government that, over a number of years now, has been listening to municipalities, has shown respect for municipalities, has recognized that municipalities have the ability, have the wisdom and have the moral authority from their voters to govern their own affairs as they see fit.

When there was a by-election called in Etobicoke–Lakeshore in 2013 and the Premier asked me to run in that riding, I agreed because the Premier laid out to me the types of initiatives that she would be pursuing over the coming years to reform planning in this province, to provide for inclusionary zoning in this province, to work on Ontario Municipal Board reform and to increase funding for municipalities in this province. In the two and a half years I've been in this chamber, I can say truthfully that we have made huge progress on all of those commitments.

1720

I particularly look at my friends across the chamber: the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, with whom I sat on Toronto council for a number of years, and his seatmate from Whitby–Oshawa, who also served on his council for a number of years. I'm pleased that these strong municipal voices are on that side of the House to

remind their party that the disrespect, the disregard, the downloading that that party committed while in office was wrong. I'm happy that those voices are now on that bench, although certainly the member from Scarborough–Rouge River may have more rightfully been a little bit further down or maybe even on this side because he did run for everybody at one point. But I'm happy that there are voices of strong municipal councillors in all three parties here to remind everybody that we need to show respect for municipalities, and this bill does that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Madam Speaker, you can't know how happy I am to speak this afternoon on this issue. I was a city councillor in Peterborough from 1985 to the fall of 2003, when I got elected to the Ontario Legislature. I was deputy mayor for eight of those 18 years. I chaired social services twice.

This is an interesting debate this afternoon. I find it interesting that there's a bit of an attempt here today to rewrite history, so I'm going to correct that this afternoon.

When the NDP had the government between 1990 and 1995—and I frankly admit, they experienced a downturn in the economy. The deficit went up, and one of the reasons the deficit went up was because of social services in the province of Ontario. Then, in 1995, there was a change in government. Mike Harris and his team came in and, oh, they were very, very shrewd because they knew that they didn't want to have a deficit like the NDP government had, and they looked at ways how they could address that. They addressed that by the famous Who Does What committee. Anybody who served in municipal politics during that period of time knew that it wasn't the Who Does What committee; it became the “who got done in committee.” That was municipalities right across the province of Ontario, and I'll tell you why.

I was on the finance committee in the city of Peterborough. They were shrewd; oh, they were shrewd and they were smart. They offloaded to municipalities those areas that, if there was a downturn in the economy, would create a deficit. They said, “Ladies and gentlemen, we're not going to have a deficit in Ontario because we sent all of those cost drivers back to the municipalities and onto the backs of the property taxpayer.” That's a fact. Anybody who's examining the statistics from that period of time knows that that was exactly the case.

Of course, then they did the other little thing going into the 1999 election. They had an asset, the 407, valued at \$9 billion. They needed a quick \$3 billion to balance the budget going into the 1999 election. They were like the Walmart guy: started at \$9 billion, rolled it back to \$8 billion, rolled it back to \$7 billion, rolled it back to \$6 billion, rolled it back to \$5 billion, rolled it back to \$4 billion, and, finally, they settled on that Walmart price of \$3 billion, sold it off to the 407 consortium and balanced their budget. That's how they did it.

When people like me who went through that experience decided to run in the 1999 and the 2003 election,

one of things we did—Jim Watson, who's now the distinguished mayor of Ottawa, was Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he initiated the upload agreement to go for 10 years, between 2008 and 2018. We have uploaded \$4 billion in the province of Ontario. That's \$4 billion off the property taxpayers of the province of Ontario because those services rightly should have been paid by the general taxpayer. We accomplished that.

Look at the gas tax. We provided millions of dollars in gas tax. My friends across the House should also remember that when it came to social housing when they were in power for eight years, the only support they gave was a rebate on the provincial sales tax for social housing. I really get quite worked up about this matter here.

I'll continue. There are some really good provisions going forward. I want to talk for a moment about the climate change issue because it's very relevant to my city of Peterborough. In 2002 and 2004, we had two 100-year storms within a two-year period. Unlike people who are running the administration on Pennsylvania Avenue today in the United States, I happen to believe that climate change is a very real thing. We experienced that personally in my community in a two-year period.

The provisions in Bill 68 that will allow municipalities to work on climate change and really move from the mentality of disaster management to disaster prevention—it's what we need to do across the province of Ontario, and we've been very supportive of that. We brought in infrastructure programs, like OCIF, that have been particularly targeted to those municipalities in the province of Ontario of 100,000 and under that need support to renew infrastructure, and in many ways, to give municipalities today the tools to move into an area, when it comes to climate change, of disaster prevention. I think all of us on all sides of the House want to make sure that is happening.

We're also changing things, for the Integrity Commissioner to look at issues from time to time, when there might be some questions in terms of issues that are dealt with in caucus, outside of caucus—whether two councillors who might get together to have a coffee, does that constitute a formal council meeting? Those are the kinds of things that this bill will certainly look to address as we move forward.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: What about the septic systems?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'll talk about the septic systems, because that's an interesting one, too. I have first-hand experience. Even though I live in the city of Peterborough, I live in an area that was annexed into the city of Peterborough in 1997. We live on an acre of property. We're in the shadow of the great Peterborough Lift Lock. Unlike Sarah Palin, I get up in the morning and I can see the Peterborough Lift Lock from my home. We have a septic bed. Two years ago, after 25 years, we put in a new septic bed. It was about \$20,000 to do that. I must say that my family, as good environmentalists—we have enough capacity now in that new septic bed to probably help out half of the city of Peterborough, because under the new guidelines it has to be of a certain size.

This is one of the things that we need to look at: Is it practical to ask people to pump out their septic systems every five years? I think the member from Windsor–Tecumseh articulated it very well when he talked about how a single individual with a modern septic system—it could really be, now, 10, 12, 13 years before you'd really have to pump out that system, because we made important changes in that area.

The other thing is, of course, to work with our municipal partners in order to help finance repairs and replacement, which is so incredibly important. Just recently, our colleague the Minister of Transportation announced an enhanced gas tax for communities right across the province of Ontario to continue to build transit, to look after those operational needs. I look at that as kind of the first element of what the fiscal framework will be between the province of Ontario and municipalities for the next 10 years, from 2018 to 2028.

We have been great partners with municipalities right across the province of Ontario. Frankly, we've gone a long way to address the “who got done in” group from 1998-99. Let me be more specific. Oh, they were a cute bunch from 1995 to 2003. In eastern Ontario, which my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West is very familiar with—the very distinguished mayor of Brighton at one time; a great mayor of Brighton, a great community—43% of all the roads and bridges were downloaded in eastern Ontario. That was a great big ditch in terms of infrastructure. But Madam Speaker, today I can report from Peterborough, from Port Hope, from Cobourg, from Kingston, from Alexandria that we're crawling out of that ditch by making those kinds of investments.

We're also helping some of our friends across the aisle. Those eastern Ontario MPPs—we're also helping them to get out of the infrastructure ditch that's in their ridings. Look, we may even help our friend from Sarnia–Lambton. He's a great guy. We supported his bill today. I know he probably has a couple of projects.

1730

This is the hallmark of this government, reaching across the aisle, working with them to help renew their infrastructure after they downloaded it all in 1998 and 1999. Madam Speaker, we're making great progress on that.

I see I have 42 seconds left. I could probably go on for about four hours this afternoon, but they won't let me do that.

I'm certainly glad that we're putting this legislation in place. We're working with our municipal partners. There are many components of Bill 68 that will allow a very mature government to get on with the challenges that they have each and every day.

One of the great things about being Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is that I get to go on the back concessions, to the kitchen tables, and talk to my municipal friends, particularly in eastern Ontario: the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, a great group; the eastern Ontario mayors, a great group. We work with them each and every day.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It gives me great pleasure to be able to stand and address the remarks from the honourable members. I want to thank the honourable member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for his comments about our member for Scarborough–Rouge River. We really appreciate the fact that our member has seen the damage that the Ontario Liberals have done to our province and has recognized that he belongs in the right party and has seen the vision for change that the PCs have here in Ontario.

I also want to thank the Minister of Agriculture for his comments about Walmart. Now, I may be biased, because unlike the minister for agricultural affairs, I actually grew up on a farm and I understand the importance of small businesses. Comparing us to Walmart—we respect all our businesses, including Walmart and the amount of people that it employs.

I want to also bring forward some of the concerns that we have with this piece of legislation, because I understand that hearkening back to the government of 13 or 14 years ago is a favourite tactic of this government, without actually providing any explanation for why they feel this bill would actually provide a benefit to the municipalities here in our ridings.

There are many good components to this bill, but what is concerning—one of the major parts—is that this bill allows councillors to participate in meetings electronically. This means you could possibly have councillors calling in from the beach. We're very concerned that this reduces transparency and accountability at municipal councils. A fascinating point is that although this government claims it's for rural and northern communities where weather might prevent councillors from attending the meeting, they then include the amendments to the City of Toronto Act as well. I'm just curious if they think Scarborough and Etobicoke are rural.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the honourable members.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to be up on my feet in the last hour of this session on Thursday afternoon. My colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh talked about this bill extensively earlier. He sees some things in the bill that are useful, that should be in place.

My colleague from London West was somewhat more critical in her views, and I think I'll hew to the position that she took, that there needed to be a lot more done and needs to be a lot more done in Ontario to deal with the difficulties that municipalities are facing.

I have to say that, as my colleague said earlier, if this government was serious about reforming the Municipal Act, it should have done a lot more work with municipalities. It should have had much more extensive consultation. It should have drawn on those municipalities to help shape this bill in a more substantive way.

But beyond this bill, Speaker, and you would know about this because of your experience with the Toronto

District School Board in the past, the downloading of expenses to municipalities has been crippling for those municipalities. Here in Toronto, the ongoing difficulties with the Toronto Transit Commission, and the fact that funding support was cut for the TTC under the Conservatives and never restored under the Liberals, has meant that in the summer in this city, air conditioning that should be functioning on subway cars isn't. When we want to encourage people to leave their cars at home, we need to have a system that's efficient, reliable, affordable and, frankly, not operated as a sweatshop. When you're in one of those hot subway cars in midsummer, the attraction to people to stay out of the subway and get into an air-conditioned car is extraordinary.

The other thing I just want to note in my last few seconds is the lack of support or funding for social housing. Speaker, we face the loss of many, many housing units in this city because of lack of support.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My comments are to the member from Etobicoke and to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and small business. But, before I go there, I just want to clear the record on the comments from the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook. I think he should have been paying attention to the Minister of Agriculture because the downloading was done by the former government, not this government. This government—he made it very, very clear—we uploaded over \$4 billion in the 13 years we've been here. So I just want to clear the record that, if he was paying attention, he wouldn't have made that comment. I'm just trying to help.

Just on the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' comments and also the member from Etobicoke: I was in municipal politics, both as councillor and as mayor, back in those dark days. I remember the former member who preceded me, a member of the Conservative Party back then, in a meeting that he had with county council in Cobourg where we were trying to express our concerns that we had with some of the downloading. He said, "Municipal politicians don't know anything about government; all they do is they're tax collectors." We were "tax collectors," same as how they called nurses "hula hoops." The relationship that we have with municipalities is not the relationship that they try to portray.

I fully support what both the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and small business and the member from Etobicoke said: Yes, there's a lot to do together; yes, we have a lot of work to do. But I can tell you, as a former municipal politician, as I talk to my counterparts in the eight municipalities I represent, they certainly have an appreciation for what we're doing. Do we need to do more? Absolutely.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you in the chair. It's been a long

day, but I'd like to add my comments to Bill 68 as well, affecting some 14 different acts.

I forgot about it until I was sitting here listening—I shouldn't say I forgot, but it seems like a long time ago now. I was on municipal council as well in the 1980s. I forgot how old I was. It made me think about it now. Some of these pages wouldn't even have been born—long before they were born. But anyway, I was on council too. I enjoyed it very immensely. It was always a pleasure working with our provincial members of either side of the House. I had a great relationship with Dave Smith a long time ago, a Liberal member from here, and, of course, Marcel Beaubien and Lorne Henderson before that. They were all rural members.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Lorne Henderson was a great member.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, Lorne Henderson—I know the minister knows his family well.

So I had the opportunity to work with those municipal—they all came out of municipal politics, actually, and were elected. Mr. Beaubien was the mayor of Petrolia and then went on to be the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for two terms. Mr. Henderson was there forever; he was there for over almost 25 years, representing the rural riding of Lambton, the riding that I represent part of now. Of course, Dave Smith, a good friend of mine too, was a member from the Peterson government. Anyway, they brought municipal experience to the Legislature from each party—and of course, Ellen MacKinnon, with the NDP party. She was a school trustee, and I knew her well too. I guess the longer you live and the longer you're around, you have the opportunity to work with different members of different parties.

I like a lot of the amendments that are in here. I'm sure that the municipalities need some of these to function. I also meet with them at Good Roads and at ROMA. I know that, as time goes on, they're doing a great job, as we are here. They're trying to do a job there, so let's all work together.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return back to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to wrap up.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I appreciate the comments made by the members from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Toronto–Danforth and Sarnia–Lambton, my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who spoke very eloquently today, and, of course, my good friend the member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

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I'm in a very positive mood this afternoon, so I don't need to respond to a few things. But, you know, it's really important in the province of Ontario that the province have a good relationship with our municipal partners. If you really look at what we've been achieved with the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, ROMA; AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; and Ontario Good Roads—if you're objective for one second, you can see the great partnership that we have and,

really, frankly, addressing some of the challenges that we inherited back in 2003 because of the repercussions of the “who got done in” committee. That was a serious time. It drove municipalities into the ditch in every part of the province of Ontario. Have we solved all of their problems? No. But we've made a very progressive start to make that happen.

I quite like the member from Sarnia–Lambton because I remember Lorne Henderson, who had my job. He was a very distinguished member. He had a great saying. When he was doing an announcement in Lambton county with Premier William Davis, Mr. Henderson would always say, “Me and Bill: We brung you the cheque.” That was his bottom line and signature sentence when he, as Minister of Agriculture, and Mr. Davis, a very distinguished Premier, would go into Lambton county.

I think that, by and large, all of us, all 107 members, work very hard to really facilitate a relationship with all our municipalities right across the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Once again, it's a privilege to rise in the Legislature to speak to Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, 2016. I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the presence of several past municipal councillors who have contributed thus far to the debate, and also the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who has taken the time out of his busy schedule to listen to the debate and also participate in it.

At the outset, it's important to acknowledge the municipal sector employees and towns and city councils, particularly the city of Oshawa and Whitby town council, who have taken the time to submit proposed changes to this legislation. It's always a pleasure to see multiple levels of government working together to achieve common objectives that serve the people of Ontario.

I really appreciate the opportunity, whenever I have it, to speak to municipal affairs legislation in the House. As a long-time local and regional councillor in Whitby and also the region of Durham, I've been able to bring that perspective to Queen's Park. I know that many of my colleagues are here this afternoon, and they've also made significant contributions thus far in the debate.

What's clear is that local governments in Ontario are in a period of transition and change. As with all transitions, the implications are significant, and they require a great degree of consideration. This period of transition in particular will impact the way that local governments fund services in their communities, staff key positions, interact with their citizens on a regular basis, and maintain critical infrastructure, both today and for the foreseeable future. The government's review of municipal legislation therefore comes at a fortuitous time. It offers municipalities, municipal professional associations, public servants and, yes, elected officials a unique opportunity to engage in a sustained and important conversation about the most significant issues faced by the municipal sector.

Those of us in the Legislature who served on local town or city or regional councils know that municipal-

ities have become increasingly complex, providing more services and expanding into a range of activities not originally envisioned at their conception. In many cases, this expansion of roles and responsibilities has been to the benefit of the citizens of these municipalities, and many have been quick and effective in adapting to the changing needs of their communities.

As the province of Ontario grew in size and industrialized, it was only natural for local governments to take on increased responsibilities beyond providing and maintaining roads, sewers and street lights. Municipalities are now responsible for a range of substantive and complex programs and services, including economic development, infrastructure, public health, housing and a range of human and social service programs.

Yet, despite the expansion of responsibility for local government, the intergovernmental relationship between the province and municipalities has remained skewed, with most of the power for the regulatory, legal and operations of local government left with the province. This seems inappropriate considering that it's municipal governments which have a greater impact on the services that people receive compared to the provincial government.

Outside of the intergovernmental relationship, the world outside local government has also shifted to become more complex in order to address the needs of citizens. Steady urbanization, rapid technological advancements, demographic transformation and globalization have all produced monumental changes in society and caused new problems that all levels of government have had to adapt to, particularly municipalities.

Local governments have worked to respond to these changes by adopting new approaches to planning and development, service delivery, law enforcement, public safety, representation, and advocacy, yet citizens in Ontario have nevertheless come to expect their governments to deliver faster, cheaper and better-quality public services while, at the same time, technology has enabled an instantaneous feedback loop that offers an increasing ability for citizens to hold their governments accountable.

Never before have citizens had such an opportunity to directly interact with various levels of government and with such speed. This further allows municipalities to understand, plan for and deliver modern solutions to modern problems.

To build on this relationship, municipalities need an enabling environment that encourages co-operation, innovation, continuous improvement and autonomy. There are many ways that this can be created, from moving towards smart regulation to seeking partnerships with businesses and people in the community. But what's clear is that there isn't any silver bullet. There's no one policy or program that can achieve this goal.

The current complexity of the problems facing municipal governments that I mentioned earlier requires a solution of equivalent thought and reflection. To achieve this requires seizing upon every opportunity to give municipalities the tools they need to respond to and

engage with the people they serve. These tools should adequately address the needs of municipalities today while also positioning them well to address the needs of the future.

The goal of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party caucus is to ensure that the Municipal Act functions as an effective document that enables local governments to operate in an efficient, effective manner while offering high-quality services to the citizens they serve.

Given the recent changes to the Municipal Elections Act to ban corporate and union donations in conjunction with proposed changes to limit the self-financing of campaigns, I would further encourage the government to:

- investigate ways to ensure a level playing field between incumbents and challengers; and

- determine ways that the province and municipalities can assist in educating and informing on the importance of municipal elections so that voters increase their awareness and subsequently their turnout.

Furthermore, the proposed discretionary exemption to allow consideration of certain third-party information supplied in confidence in a closed meeting should be clarified by further defining “third-party information” and “supplied in confidence.”

The proposed amendment to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act would allow a person, which includes a non-resident, corporation or municipality, to apply to a judge for a determination on whether a member violated the act. It should be removed in favour of the existing requirement that only an elector can apply for such determination.

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Speaker, among the many changes Bill 68 proposes to the laws that govern municipalities is one that would make the role of municipal councillor more appealing—if not that, then definitely introducing a measure that caters to anyone looking to start and/or add to their family. Bill 68 would add a parental leave for municipal politicians, to allow them to be with the newest addition to their family for 20 weeks without penalty.

Currently, if a municipal councillor wishes to take time away from their duties to welcome a new child into her or his family, there are only two options: ensure that absence from regular council meetings isn't longer than three months, or request a leave of absence from their duties for any period of time. The latter option requires the consent of that person's council colleagues. If neither of those is followed, the council member's peers would be forced into a position to declare that person's seat as vacant. Once such a declaration is made, council would have 60 days to either appoint a new person to the seat or hold a by-election.

Under the proposed change, every municipality in Ontario would be required to add a parental leave to the policies governing council conduct. That leave would be for any period up to 20 weeks, which is seven to nine weeks longer than a councillor can be absent from regular council meetings without penalty. The leave

would be available to women and men for births and adoptions.

This clause of Bill 68 is worthy of support and will make the role of municipal councillor more flexible to the demands of members who are in the stages of building their families. It extends—partially—the same access to parental leave that every other working Canadian is eligible to receive. I think any municipality would greatly value the opportunity to have a more diverse group of individuals run for city council as a result of this particular initiative.

That being said, we do have issues with the bill. Specifically, we have concerns about the government's proposal to allow municipal councillors to call in to council meetings instead of attending in person. This is neither transparent nor accountable. I and many of my colleagues here, including former municipal councillors, know that municipal meetings are conducted in the public eye, and on the record more often than not. However, there are times when some agenda items are dealt with in private, in closed meetings, particularly when it concerns real estate transactions, human resources issues and the private information of citizens. This measure that allows councillors to call in to meetings represents a threat to not only the privacy of individuals, but the ability for councillors to conduct such private business with the confidence of knowing that what is discussed remains private. Imagine for a moment that a councillor has called in to a meeting. Other councillors present in the chambers have no concrete way of knowing who else may or may not be on the other end of that call.

Bill 68 creates this vulnerability in how municipalities do business. It runs the risk of making it far more difficult for municipalities to serve constituents in an open and transparent manner.

However, what is really concerning is that the government claimed that the proposed legislative change is for rural and northern communities, where weather might prevent councillors from attending the meeting, and then included it in the amendments to the City of Toronto Act as well.

Further, last spring, the Legislature passed Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, which dealt with municipal elections, including donations to candidates and third-party advertisers. At the time, the then minister said, "We hope to increase transparency in municipal elections, so we are proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising in order to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and transparent support. This would include setting contribution ... limits." Just five minutes later, when the government introduced Bill 68, they increased those contributions from \$750 to \$1,200—\$750 to \$1,200.

Furthermore, the government is now proposing increasing the amount an individual can contribute to their own campaign to \$25,000. That is occurring despite testimony at committee last spring that this type of change would create an uneven playing field and make it

easier for independently wealthy people to get elected. Faced with that particular outcome, one certainly has to wonder what the motivation was to make such a change mere months after patting themselves on the back for passing their first piece of legislation.

The government also appears to have been a bit confused at the time of tabling this legislation. On the same day that the Minister of Municipal Affairs introduced this bill, the Minister of Finance introduced Bill 70, which required direct election of regional chairs. It actually amends the same sections of the Municipal Act as the bill we're currently debating today. In fact, if Bill 68 had passed first, then Bill 70's changes would have had to be repealed.

Members of this House will recall that Bill 70 was the omnibus bill that had nothing to do with finance, as the government purported it was a budget implementation act. It amended financial pieces of legislation not exactly noted for being about finance, like the Municipal Act, the City of Toronto Act and the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act. When asked why direct election of the regional chair was in the finance bill, the only explanation that was provided at the time was that Bill 70 was likely to get through the legislative process more quickly.

Clearly, one would think that it would have been more appropriate to include these types of changes in a piece of legislation that exclusively dealt with municipal affairs, so it could be considered in that light, rather than in an omnibus piece of legislation aimed at being passed quickly.

One certainly has to wonder sometimes whether this government seems to have any plan at all or whether they continue to drift like a kite in the wind, out of fresher ideas and simply only interested in holding on to power.

While we're pleased this legislation looks at a number of items that municipalities requested, including the city of Oshawa, the town of Whitby and the region of Durham, such as the definitions of meetings, expanding prudent investor rules to all municipalities and moving the start date for new councils, there are still areas in this bill that we cannot support. We will be opposing this bill at second reading with the hope that at the committee stage we'll be able to work with the government on changes and improve this bill.

Having said that, there are a lot of good things here in Bill 68, but as long as provisions allowing councillors to call in to council meetings continue to be in this bill, it's not a piece of legislation that we can support.

Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 68. I look forward to hearing my other colleagues' thoughts before the bill heads to standing committee and ultimately back to the Legislature for third reading and final debate. My colleagues and former colleagues from council will know that the best outcomes arise from an extensive and broad consultation, not only with the municipal sector but with other stakeholders. That's when we arrive at the best outcome. This particular legislation is a good start. It does have some challenges

within the body of it. My hope would be that with the guidance and direction of not only the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but people in this Legislature from all parties who have served with distinction on their councils, they can see their way to making the amendments, some of which I've described here and others have described this afternoon, and arrive at a point that

serves the best interests of municipalities in Ontario, but more broadly, the citizens of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing it's 6 p.m., I will be adjourning the House until Monday, February 27, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
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John Fraser, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch