



No. 51

N° 51

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 41st Parliament

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

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 7 March 2017

Mardi 7 mars 2017

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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



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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Tuesday 7 March 2017

Mardi 7 mars 2017

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE
MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

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

Hon. Michael Chan: A point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Michael Chan: I seek unanimous consent to have the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change speak a second time to Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to speak a second time. Do we agree? Agreed.

Further debate. Further debate. Last call for further debate.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. This is somewhat of a surprise; we expected the subject of the unanimous consent to be the next speaker, but nevertheless, I will fill in the breach here.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 84, the medical-assistance-in-dying piece of legislation. I had hoped to jot down a few notes, but unfortunately, time does not allow it at this point. So I may seem a little bit confused at times, which is probably normal for me.

This is a tremendously emotional debate. We have to think of that when we're considering the responses that we get from people, not only in the medical community, but in our communities at large. Think of what we're asking for: Only a few short years ago, if you were to

assist someone in a medically assisted death, you would possibly wind up in jail. You would certainly be guilty of a criminal act. The world is changing very quickly, and perhaps too quickly for a lot of people to adjust their own thoughts and their own feelings.

I know that a medical practitioner, who in their view and in their beliefs—when they took the Hippocratic oath, their belief was that it is their job and their professed goal, and what they would do in all circumstances, to preserve life to its fullest and to its natural end. And now we're changing how we view their role in not only how they treat us medically but in our end time.

Also, people who have spent their lives, for religious or other tenets that they hold truly and dear to their hearts, believing that any intervention that hastens the end of one's life is wrong—and they have that right to believe that. That's how I grew up. The teachings in my family would not have supported medical assistance in dying. That was just not what was considered right when I was being raised.

Now we have a change where the Supreme Court has ruled that the right of a person who wishes to have medical assistance in dying because they have determined themselves that to continue living is worse than dying more immediately for them. The court has ruled that they have that right to make that choice and that our society, that our lawmakers, must have laws that support that decision. So that decision has been made by the court, and now the federal government has passed the law that allows for medical assistance in dying. They also expect now that the provinces will bring in legislation that supports the federal legislation, or at least piggy-backs on it, so that we're all speaking from the same hymnal—no pun intended. That's what we're here doing with Bill 84.

But that is only part of the debate. As lawmakers, we pass legislation, we bring rules in, but the emotion is never part of it. The emotion is for the people who are directly involved. The emotion is for the families, the emotion is for the physicians, the nurses and those in the health care community who are going to be part of this. They're the ones who can be torn. You can remove yourself, in this little cocoon at Queen's Park, from all of the internal conflicts and strife that someone might feel with legislation like this because we're just passing the legislation. It's all written down in some logical fashion, but we're not living it. We may be living it at some time, I'm not suggesting that none of us will, but we're not part of that debate. We're not part of that tearing apart of what one's own beliefs might be should they be forced to participate in a medically assisted death.

I have received a huge number of communications from people in my riding asking that the government would heed those feelings, would heed that emotion that is out there; that concern that, “Should I be part of this, I would be going against not only the beliefs that I currently hold, but the beliefs that I was born to hold.” That’s what people are feeling. I think that view has to be respected.

In Alberta they have made the changes in medical assistance in dying and assured that a physician cannot be forced to participate, but also that a physician cannot be forced to refer; that there is—I read it here and I didn’t have time to go over it again—a care coordination service in Alberta, which could easily be established in Ontario, so that the physician doesn’t have to directly refer but refers to a care coordination—a clearing house, so to speak. We could have that in Ontario as well so that a physician, a nurse practitioner or a nurse would not have to conflict themselves or feel that they would have to go home feeling guilty about something that they did.

We understand this is the law now. People have the right to die, should they choose to, if they satisfy all the criteria. The criteria are there, and that’s very necessary that those criteria are there to ensure that they meet the requirements for a medically assisted death.

0910

But you have to ask yourself how you would feel if you were told that you must do something that in the very bottom of your heart you believed was wrong. If you must now do that, but you believe in the bottom of your heart that it is wrong, how would you feel that you were being forced to do that? We do have doctors in the House, so to speak, but I don’t know that any of them are fully practising; otherwise, they wouldn’t be doing their job here. We’re not put into that position, but if we were, how would we feel? How does this juxtapose with the focus we have on palliative care, to give people dignity in those final moments of death? Our hospice program is a wonderful program. We have to balance those things out so that people are not feeling that they are being torn apart: what the court says versus what their heart and their belief in their god says not to do. So this is something that we really have to look hard and long at before we move ahead with this legislation, and that’s why we need to pass these amendments.

I have had, as I said, countless communications from people in my riding who are begging that something be done to ensure that the conscience rights of people are protected, people who are involved in this. I think that is at the very core of the debate today. This legislation is going to pass. We all understand that. The government has brought it forward. The government has a majority. It’s going to pass. But I, on behalf of all of those people who are torn by this—because the world is changing so fast. On so many of the things that people believed were absolutely core beliefs, Christian beliefs, only a few short years ago, the courts have said, “I’m sorry, but the world has changed, and that’s not going to be the law anymore.”

But we have to respect the individual rights of people. I’m not even going to have time to get to it, but we’re also reading about where doctors who have actually participated in a medically assisted death are now saying, “Take my name off the list. Once I actually participated in doing that, I became conflicted myself. I no longer believe that I can participate in that, because my conscience no longer allows me to do that.” You have to understand the gut feeling that people have on a bill such as this.

We have an opportunity as a group of legislators here, both government and opposition, to look into our hearts and ask ourselves how we would want to be treated if we were in that position. We’re going to put forward an amendment that protects the conscience rights of people in medically assisted deaths.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It is always difficult to follow my good friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke because he brings such passion to every debate in this House.

Medical assistance in dying, Bill 84, is a difficult bill. It brings us into the discussion of attitudes and morals and how times have changed somewhat over these many years. It wasn’t so long ago, Speaker—when you were a teenager, for example—when we had a different opinion on drinking and driving. It was quite acceptable, and people didn’t wear seat belts in those days. In those days, it was quite common to see parents smoking in an automobile with the windows rolled up and three or four or five kids in the car at the same time, inhaling that second-hand smoke. We don’t see that very much anymore, and when we see people driving, we expect that they’re wearing seat belts and they’re not impaired. I’m not saying it doesn’t happen, but I think morals have changed somewhat.

It’s the same with same-sex marriage, Speaker. When we were younger, that was something nobody really talked about or nobody really, publicly said, “I support that.” We have changed in our attitudes. It’s the same with the anti-Islamophobia bills at the federal and provincial levels: very strong opinions one way or the other—not always for the right reasons, but very strong opinions. When you have the federal government passing a law and you have the Supreme Court of Canada passing a law that says we must come into compliance, that brings us to the debate today on medical assistance in dying.

I agree with the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: There are other attitudes, other opinions, that we have to take into account when we discuss this bill at committee.

Thank you for your time this morning, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I’m pleased to make some comments on the comments from the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I found his comments, frankly, to be quite profound and helpful. His reference to balance

was exactly where I think many of my constituents and I come down on this issue.

Choice is difficult if you don't have choices, and it's my own belief—and my wife is a family physician, so we have lots of talks about this at home—that a big part of the issue will be to develop a much better palliative care network. That choice perhaps is one that some perceive not to be available at this time, and it would be nice if we could go there.

I've had conversations with the minister about this and with many doctors in my riding. I shouldn't say many; maybe a dozen. That's many. You normally don't get a dozen people in on any issue. But I've had conversations with folks concerned about the conscience side of this, and there are strong feelings both ways. That's not surprising, given the nature of the issue before us.

I've always believed that people have a responsibility to live and to use their giftedness as best able to make a difference, but that has to be juxtaposed to some other thinking from time to time. I'm pleased to know and be given assurances that Ontario, through our minister, will be developing a care coordination service, in keeping with the comments from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I appreciated his comments. They were well placed, and on this difficult issue, I think we need to move forward with sensitivity but with a recognition that conscience rights are extremely important.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I rise today to give comment on medical-assistance-in-dying legislation that is before us. It is hard to follow the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who is very passionate and eloquent in his delivery on this topic that we are all very much caring about in our ridings.

As many of you know, and I'll say it again, I nursed for 20 years. I'm happy we're having this conversation. We are having it because of the Supreme Court ruling that the federal government update this legislation; thus we are, as a province. I think we have all heard within our ridings the concerns that are being brought forward about the access to medically assisted dying and the clarity that needs to be brought forward in this piece of legislation.

It is a very emotional issue. I bring up the nursing factor because I saw patients suffering, I saw families suffering, and we say, "Is there a better way?" You have to balance that with the health care professionals that are caring for these individuals—the doctors, the nurses, the RPNs, and now we are introducing not only doctors but nurse practitioners into the mix to assist people with medically assisted dying.

It affects six acts. We have all discussed the palliative care. I have an excellent palliative care wing in Lindsay Ross Memorial Hospital. Not all areas have great access to palliative care. I don't have residential hospice. I don't have any, in all of my riding. So we need to give people some more choices.

As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said, we need to bring amendments forward to protect the conscience rights of people—that is, I think, all in this House, that we are willing to make this legislation as right as it can be.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West and add my two minutes' worth, in this case, to debate. Today we're talking about Bill 84, the medical-assistance-in-dying statute law.

I had much more time to speak to this last week, but I'd like to touch on what the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke brought up, because he brought up very valid points. Again, we have to do this. There was a Supreme Court ruling that is making it so that we have to come up with a law around this. But the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke brought up very good points when it comes to the medical professionals and how they feel morally about providing medical assistance in dying. To that point, last week during my 20 minutes, I brought up that we have to make sure that those who do provide medical assistance in dying—whether that's a doctor, a nurse, or if there is a pharmacist involved, that there are supports in place for them to be able to mentally deal with the fact that they are providing these services. There have to be supports in place for the families of the patients who may choose medical assistance in dying.

Currently, we have a health care system, specifically the mental health portion, that is really—I wouldn't even say struggling to keep up. It's not keeping up with the needs of our communities. Now we are going to have medical professionals who are, maybe, going to be needing to access mental health supports because they provide medical assistance in dying. That's something that the government side really needs to look at when they're putting together a bill such as this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his final comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Windsor West for their comments.

If I had an hour it would have been great. There are so many things I would like to touch on, including the emotional tug of war that families go through if they have a family member who is considering opting for medical assistance in dying, and how that can be an experience that can be challenging, and at the end, maybe freeing or whatever. But it's something that families will need to go through when someone makes that decision. I can't get into that so much today.

I do want to say, and I thank the member—I know other members on the government side have spoken similarly to myself about the need for some protections for conscience rights. But I think it needs to be extended

even for the referral part of it because if someone has to refer directly, then they do feel they are part of the process. They feel they are directly involved. To be able to refer people to a clearing house, so to speak, the care coordination service like they have in Alberta, would remove some of that conscience problem for them. I cannot speak for the third party—I haven't had the discussion—but we on our side want to see those conscience rights enshrined in an amendment to change the bill.

I say to my friends on the government side: Please, for those of you who feel this way, do whatever you can to influence the minister and your government to ensure that these changes are made, because your role in this is critical. You are on the governing side. You are the ones who will actually decide whether this amendment passes. Please bring it forward with us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This morning, I'm happy to contribute to the debate on this bill, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act. The debate on this bill can't be taken lightly. As we know, it's a very serious issue, because it's time to talk publicly and openly about medical assistance in dying and the legal framework it would require.

Many members have already identified how this bill has impacted people in their communities in a very personal way. People have told us that they have felt shut out by the approach the government has taken. They tell us that this bill feels rushed and very much like it's being forced upon them. They know that there has been too little consultation and too few voices contributing to the issue, and that is another missed opportunity by this government to listen to meaningful, thoughtful dialogue by people affected by the bill on this very important issue.

They don't feel that the government has properly addressed the issue. Ontarians are getting fed up with the "just trust us" or "we know best" approach that the Liberal government has taken time and time again, specifically on issues that people want to be a part of and want to be engaged in. It's time to allow not just the Liberals to be a part of the conversation and to have their say. Through debate here in this chamber we can foster dialogue within our communities. We need to talk about the tough issues, and nothing is harder to talk about than death—our own death, the death of a family member or our loved ones. The task is daunting and fearful but a necessary one.

Historically, it has been a crime in Canada to assist another person ending his or her own life. Criminal prohibition has applied to circumstances where a physician provides or administers medication that intentionally brings about a patient's death at the request of the patient. In the case of *Carter v. Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada was asked to consider if criminal prohibition on medical assistance in dying or physician-assisted death violated the charter rights of competent adults, specifically those who suffer intolerably from grievous and untreatable medical conditions, and seek assistance in dying.

The landmark *Carter* decision by the Supreme Court of Canada on February 6, 2015, did unanimously determine that an absolute prohibition on medical assistance in dying violated the charter rights of these individuals and was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court of Canada also suspended their decision to allow the federal and/or provincial governments to design, should they so choose, a framework to govern the provision of medical assistance in dying, effectively making it legal in Canada on June 6, 2016. In response, the federal government put forward Bill C-14, which only amends the Criminal Code and limits the right to assisted dying to those whose natural death is "reasonably foreseeable." The Senate had amended the bill to include those who aren't terminally ill, but the Commons voted down and rejected that change.

It was reported that the majority of senators were disappointed that Bill C-14 was restrictive and overly narrow in scope. Senator André Pratte was quoted as saying, "I am convinced the government is making a serious and cruel mistake by taking away the right to medically assisted dying from a group of patients, those who are not terminally ill yet suffering terribly." It's also worth noting that even those senators who morally opposed medical assistance in dying voted in favour of Bill C-14 because they believed that any law governing assisted death was better than no law at all.

So what does the provincial version actually accomplish? The first thing it does is amend the Coroners Act to mandate that each and every time there is an instance of medical assistance in dying, the physician or nurse practitioner involved in helping the patient must report the details of the assistance and the occurrence to the coroner. The coroner will receive those mandatory reports and will use their discretion to determine if an investigation is warranted. The bill further mandates that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services will review the coroner's handling of the registry and investigation process within two years. If we're reading this correctly, the ministry doesn't have responsibility to monitor this program until two years after it has been up and running.

Moving on, the second part of the bill amends the Excellent Care for All Act, which is meant to ensure that if a person decides to use medical aid in dying they will not be denied a right or refused a benefit that would otherwise have been allotted to them. It will be important to keep a watchful eye on the reaction of insurance providers as policies and other benefits that people have purchased in the case of death will have to be respected, and whatever benefit the family is entitled to will have to be paid out. While the intention behind the amendment is that nobody will be denied a right or refused a benefit because their loved one has decided to use medical assistance in dying, it will be important to track any changes to underwriting of policies coming forward.

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The bill will also change the Excellent Care for All Act to provide any physicians and nurse practitioners,

and those who assist them in the lawful provision of MAID responsibilities, with immunity from reprisals and from bringing them to court. It includes strict regulations around alleged negligence. They will not be insulated from being brought in front of their governing college or court if negligence is suspected or proven.

As the NDP critic for long-term care, we know that advocates and key stakeholders have expressed grave concerns about the legislation excluding long-term-care homes in the province. How will they fare under legislation, and why were their voices ignored?

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, as well as the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, will also be amended so that FIPPA and MFIPPA requests will still be allowed. But any identifying information for a clinician or a facility will be blocked out, so you will not be able to use FIPPA or MFIPPA to find out who provides medical assistance in dying and where medical assistance in dying is provided.

The act changes the Vital Statistics Act and regulations from 1994, and it clarifies that the coroner does not need to sign a medical certificate when somebody decides to end their life through medical assistance in dying, except that the coroner can still choose to investigate that death. So you won't need a coroner's certificate or signature when people choose medical assistance in dying.

Lastly, the bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, WSIB, to clarify that a worker who receives medical assistance in dying is deemed to have died from the injury or disease for which the worker was deemed eligible to receive MAID.

Right now, we have in Ontario a very polarized population when it comes to this bill, because it is like any issue that comes forward in Legislatures or in society: There are always opposite points of view. But what a government's responsibility should be is to provide a safe space; an area where people have access to get information, to speak freely, and to have those opposing conversations on many of those polarizing issues that we can talk about. It's the government's job to bring those people together so that they can find a common place of understanding where they are on those issues and, hopefully, come to some kind of common ground that can help people who are asking for MAID services.

When we talk about the majority government today, they do have, ultimately, the power to pass this bill and, ultimately, the power in committee to consider amendments that people want to see in this bill. I hope, when we are in committee, when it comes to this discussion, that there will be some consideration and some flexibility and compromise around some of the things that people bring forward, as doctors talk about their conscience and whether or not they want to participate in this process.

I look forward to the comments around this bill. It's a very important issue that needs to be discussed in today's times that we're facing. I'm glad that we are having these tough, difficult conversations; they need to be had. We

need to plan for the inevitable situation when people come to that crossroads in their medical circumstance, whether or not they are choosing MAID.

Thank you very much for the time to debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from London–Fanshawe. I really very much appreciated her remarks.

There was something inside her debate where, toward the end, she talked about creating a space. I think it's critical, when we look at this, since there is some polarization—actually, there's a bit of polarization on each side, and then a bunch of people in the middle.

The reality is, you've got two rights. You've got the rights of conscience, which are very important. They are core to our beliefs. They aren't necessarily just faith and religion. There's how we view life and what we're doing here and where we're going next. There are also the rights of people to access this service. They are two very difficult rights to balance. What we have to do, and I agree, is create or make a space where we can all come through this together because otherwise it's not going to work.

This is eight months old. It is eight months old, maybe nine. It's something that's new to many people, many practitioners. We're building pathways to act for access. All those pathways aren't built; all those relationships aren't there. If we take positions that are too hard on one side or the other, we're going to eliminate some of those pathways.

I'll tell you a very quick story. I was speaking to a nurse at the RNAO breakfast last week. She remembered when she first started nursing and there was a cancer patient, and he was screaming in pain—screaming in pain. The doctor would not apply more morphine at the time—this was many years ago—because the patient might become an addict. The patient was going to die.

So our thinking has evolved, and it will evolve. It will evolve as it has with things like palliative sedation and, to the member from London–Fanshawe, we have to create that space where it allows all of us to come through this together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise to respond to the remarks from my colleague the member for London–Fanshawe about Bill 84, the medical assistance in dying act. One of the points that is a real concern for our community—London West, London–Fanshawe—is around access to palliative care. Access to medical assistance in dying has to be balanced by access to comprehensive, appropriate, adequate palliative care. Our community has a real shortage. We are struggling with a shortage of palliative care beds.

There was an article from the London Free Press from a year ago, February 2016. The South West Hospice Palliative Care Network released a report showing that London or that the London region only has 26 palliative

beds available when the population would call for three times as many beds that would be needed. The experts from the hospice palliative care network say that a city with our population should have about 59 to as many as 78 palliative care beds. The lack of these beds means that we have 1,400 people in our region each year who would rather die at home who end up going to hospital against their wishes, against the wishes of their family.

This is not dying with dignity. This is a disservice to the people that we represent, to the people in this province who need to have access to appropriate end-of-life supports so that they can die in dignity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever ici en rapport avec MAID, the medical assistance in dying bill.

I rise to remind us here of the scope of the bill that is limited and that responded to a very difficult issue in our society that confronted the Supreme Court, where you have people who are suffering incredible pain with no hope of recovery who wish to end their life in dignity, to have control over the end of their lives. I think the court was very mindful of ensuring that there would be no pressure on anyone to end their life in a time where they wouldn't want to pursue it. The concern of the court was to carve this possibility for all of us eventually to make a decision about how we want to end our life with dignity while ensuring that no vulnerable adult, or even children, would ever be pressed by their family, by their community, or by their despair to end their lives.

In the context of the court, what they were seeking to ensure was that possibility, that possibility that should be offered. Since then, I think we should remind ourselves that the bill that is in front of us is simply about trying to make this a reality for the people who would so choose. In doing so, we have to remind ourselves that the bill must be read in light of our constitutional guarantees of freedom of conscience. We have to read within this bill that it is done with protecting the freedom of conscience of nurse practitioners or doctors. There's nothing in this bill, and there will never be anything in this bill, forcing anyone to do an act against his or her conscience.

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That's a little bit about where the bill stands. The issue now that confronts us is, in the implementation, can we facilitate and reassure people that indeed that's the intent of the bill?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the speech this morning by my colleague from London–Fanshawe. She has always brought so much feeling to the debate; it's about what she feels in her heart. She doesn't speak as loud as me, but she speaks as well. She covers—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Nobody speaks as loudly as you, Yak.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know nobody is as loud as me. My kids always used to say, “Dad, why are you

shouting?” I'd say, “I'm not shouting. That's just the way I talk.”

To the member from Ottawa–Vanier, while there may be nothing in the bill, there's nothing in the bill to protect. That's what we need to see brought into the bill: something to protect those people who are going through this struggle, as everybody will.

I hope that I never face this. I'm not going to face this as a medical practitioner—I know that—but I hope I never face the time in my life where I'm wondering about whether I can live the way I'm living. I've got to tell you, I'm not afraid to die. I'm afraid of how I might die, like a lot of people. They don't want to spend a lot of time suffering in those final days. We all hope for a smooth transition into the next life, if there is one. I believe there is one; some people don't. That's what I'm hoping for someday. But not everybody is going to leave in that way.

The member from London talked about our palliative care system. For those people who have been in hospice, and I've known many of them, it is a wonderful service, but do we have enough? Do we have enough to give those people that kind of care in those days where they don't make the other choice? Some people may feel that they have to make the choice for medically assisted death because they don't feel we have enough of the compassionate care in our system to let them comfortably pass on to the next.

I think there are a lot of things, but I do want to say again that the conscience rights must be protected in an amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): For final comments, I return to the member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to thank the members from Ottawa Centre, London West, Ottawa–Vanier and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

The member from Ottawa Centre addressed the fact that we need to have more space where people can feel at liberty to talk freely. I hope when we have those committee hearings on this bill that there will be enough time for that to happen. An important role the government can take in creating that space is by allowing access with notification, time for travel, and how long the time for presentations can be. We don't want to see it rushed. We want to see those be fulsome deputations, that people can make it there and have that opportunity to contribute. That has been one of the downfalls that people have talked about, that they haven't had enough time to do that.

The member from London West talked about our hospice palliative care network in London, and she's quite correct. As the seniors' critic as well as the long-term-care and home care critic, this is not just a seniors' issue; it's not an age issue. This can happen to anyone at any time in their lives, right? It's a very tragic thing that it does happen when it isn't expected. When that occurs, people want to have, I think, the choice, and family members want to have the opportunity perhaps to talk

about that and whether it's an option or not. It's a very deep-down, core issue that we have to face whether we want to or not. It's going to happen.

The member from Ottawa–Vanier talked about how in this bill there's nothing forcing professionals to act on this bill, and that's good. I hope that is the case, which I'm sure it is. But we want to have a system where if they choose that, what's the option for the patient? How do they deliver that service in the end?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I just want to commend my colleagues from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and from London–Fanshawe. I think they both elevated this debate in a most thoughtful way. I always feel very proud to be a member of this House when I'm following speakers like my two colleagues, who I think made a very important contribution to this discussion. I'm feeling very privileged to speak to this, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to talk about this because I think my life experience has given me a much different perspective on this than most others. What concerns me most about this legislation isn't that the legislation isn't good; I think it is. It's not that it shouldn't be implemented; I think it should be, and I think we should be respectful of the courts. I think there has been a healthy debate around the issues of conscience for health care practitioners. But there's an issue that I would like to try and explore a bit because I think, going forward, the context of this is going to be very important.

When I turned 20, AIDS was not a word. It was one of those shocking moments in my life where something was about to happen that none of us understood, and it was going to change the trajectory of my life, my sense of well-being, my fundamental politics, my spirituality and all of my belief systems.

By the end of my twenties, on my 30th birthday, I remember marking it by going to a funeral for a 43rd friend of mine, yet another gay man who died of AIDS in his twenties. I left my career. I went and volunteered and started an AIDS clinic in Winnipeg. Eventually that led to politics. The moment of my life I will never forget was trying to deal with this crisis without support. The provincial government had refused to give the clinic that we were doing—it was a volunteer clinic—a billing number, and the federal government of the day, the Prime Minister, who I knew and respected, Prime Minister Mulroney, and friends of mine—because I knew many members of the cabinet—said that AIDS was a moral issue, not a health issue, and there would be no funding. That and the fact that it was gay men who were dying totally changed the context and the kinds of choices and resources that were available, and the dynamic that I saw play out impacted at a societal level and limited the choices that people had about living or dying.

I think that we have to recognize, as the member from London–Fanshawe said, that this often isn't people in their advanced years trying to figure out how to close out their life with dignity. Another pandemic could come

along at any moment. Things happen that surprise us. I don't think anyone of us in this House in the 2000 election thought a year later we would be in the worst global recession in our lifetime. That changed all of our agendas politically. We had to deal with something that came from outside our country. In the next few years, climate change is going to kill more people probably than any other event. It's going to create all kinds of issues globally around fairness, human rights and migration.

I remember the moment that changed my life was when my friend Jim, who I had been cooking meals for every week because there was no health care supports for people with HIV; there was no funding at the time—grabbed me by the face—he was very frail, he was about 25, a very athletic young guy, a nurse—and said, “What are you doing with your life, Glen?” I said, “Jim, I work for the post office.” He said—as the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said—“What's your life about?” The member from Ottawa South said that. He said, “If you died right now, what would they put on your gravestone? You worked for the post office?” I said, “Jim, there's nothing wrong with working for the post office.” He said, “Well, what do you want to do?” I said, “I want to be a father. I'd love to be a city councillor. I love city stuff and city building. I'd like to see gay and lesbian human rights. I'd like to see our clinic properly funded and recognized. I'd like us to see a pride day.” He said, “Well, why aren't you doing that?” I said, “I'm gay. It's Winnipeg. It's 1987. Harvey Milk got shot 11 months after—in San Francisco. There are not a lot of gays in this town and it's a very conservative town.” He said, “Why aren't you trying these things?” He said, “I only have a short time, probably, to live. What are you doing with your life?”

I remember that profoundly, because a week later when I came back on a Wednesday to cook his meal, he had passed away. He had left a note and he said, “Just do it.” As a result of that I went out and tried—I wanted to be a parent; that was one of the other things on my list—and within five years, which is what he gave me as a deadline, all of those things had happened. At that time, I thought I was HIV-positive like all of my friends and I would never be standing here today, I'd never have made it past 50.

From the intimacy of closing out his life over several months, I discovered my own reason for being alive and found the courage to take on risks I never could. If it wasn't for Jim, I probably would have lived my life hiding in the shadows, living my life for the things I was afraid of and the people I feared, not living my life for the people I love and the things I hope for. I think if you can dance in the sunshine and not hide in the shadows, that's an extraordinary thing.

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But I discovered that amongst my friends who were gay at that time, those who were living in fear often chose to end their lives. I remember the most difficult job I had was often sitting in the living room of people with a young man trying to explain to their parents, providing support in a family reconciliation, trying to explain to

mom and dad—it was usually mom who was present; dad often left or didn't come—that their son had a terminal illness and that they were gay. I would say, sadly, that almost half the time, the parents, usually the father, asked the son to leave and disowned them at that time. We took this young man away from his family, and that factor, not actually having access to the people you love—for a young man, breaking your relationship with your father, whom you love—was so destructive that I saw so many of my friends give up or find creative ways to end their lives.

There's social context to this. Many people in racialized minorities have challenges. All the people who have issues with addiction, who live in poverty, who are street-involved are often at that intersection of the kinds of illnesses—they're often younger in life, living in poverty, confronting these with less supports. My concern is that we have, when we implement this, a broad social context. We understand that some minorities, people in different levels of poverty, people with different faiths and different communities are going to react to this. Whether or not we're talking about ending your life in the context of a pandemic or doing so gracefully in old age, with dignity—they have profoundly different contexts.

How governments respond on human rights, especially today in North America, when we're seeing a greater level of bullying and indifference—and there seems to be permission out there to make other people “other” and to create some very destructive attitudes about each other. We've always grown up—and every political party in this House has worked to knit Canadians together, to celebrate diversity. Whether you're a Conservative, a Liberal or a New Democrat, I think you hold that. But this idea that everyone grows up with self-esteem—the self-esteem of a person.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, one of my dear friends. I was in my mid-twenties, working at the clinic when he came in. He was about 17 at the time. He had basically given up and decided to end his life. By some miracle, he didn't. About two years after this, he had sort of tried to figure this out, and he was very sick. He had cytomegalovirus and he was looking at losing his sight. He had pneumocystis pneumonia twice. The doctors had said if he were sick again—he had very little reason to go on, and he was terrified of dementia.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke talked about when you want to die, it's not a fear of death—though many people are afraid to die; I've seen that in my life, working on the streets. But you want to die with dignity and you want to die intact. My mother always says the thing she's most afraid of is Alzheimer's. She doesn't want to lose her mental faculties. Those are different choices for different people.

But in this case, by some miracle, about six months later, the cocktails came out. What was completely unexpected was a medical breakthrough on AIDS that allowed people to live. This young fellow is now in his forties and doesn't live very far from here, and we often talk about that. That decision that he made—he came so close to ending his life, having no idea.

On the other hand, the other things that people have to navigate that we often don't talk about are double-blind trials for drugs, the power of pharmaceuticals, and sometimes the egos of researchers. I had many friends who died trying double-blind studies, discovering what I never knew about, which was a drug rebound effect, which they were never properly informed about. Most of people died within a month or two after trying these drugs because the unintended consequences of the drugs were there. Just the choices you have to make if you decide to live are so complex, and the knowledge that you have to have about interventions.

I'm just hoping, as we go forward, Mr. Speaker—and I support this law—that we actually look at this from the perspective of the person making that choice, whether they're Catholic or agnostic or whatever they are, whatever they need—that we actually realize that and that those choices don't follow equally on everyone. People who are privileged, who have high self-esteem in our society are more empowered to make choices. There are fewer choices for people who are often in crisis or in a minority. I just ask for that thoughtfulness, that we build that into our plans and implementation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for his comments today. He talked about when he ended up recognizing the needs of that person. We get that, and that's why the law is there. We also have to recognize the needs of the other people.

If I can take us back in history to 1962, to Canada's last hanging, last execution. The tenor of the day of the public at that time was, “We want capital punishment. We want those people to be hung.” But somebody had to be the one who pulled the lever on those gallows. Would you want to force someone who couldn't do it, where it was against their will to pull that lever? The answer is no. The answer is no.

I appreciate the personal stories of the minister. I myself have a brother who wasted away and died of AIDS. I have two brothers, including my twin, who died by their own hand. We recognize not everybody is going to die in palliative care in dignity, but we need to do what we can to ensure that is an option available to them. I say to the minister—and you're a member of the cabinet, not just a backbencher over there—I didn't hear you talk about—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, no, but you get to meet on Wednesday mornings and talk about these things. This is crucial. This is crucial: that the decision in that room comes back to this Legislature with protection for those people of the population of this country who, in their good conscience, in their beliefs, could not be the one to pull the lever on the gallows. We have to protect them too.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for his eloquence

and his honesty in sharing his personal experiences with this issue. As the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke just said, we all bring personal experiences that shape the way that we view the issues that we debate here in this Legislature.

I saw my aunt, a very vibrant woman in her early sixties, felled by ALS. She had the diagnosis in April. She passed away in November. At the time, the only option for her to end her life was to have the feeding tube withdrawn. The protracted process, the agony that this caused to the family while her pain was being managed and the feeding tube was withdrawn was unconscionable. The Supreme Court has ruled that people deserve access to medical assistance in dying.

At the same time, our job as legislators is to balance the concerns of all of the people that we represent in this province to ensure that there are opportunities, that there are safe spaces for dialogue to occur for the two sides, which we see right now are highly polarized, to reach some kind of accommodation and consensus about how we move forward in a way that respects physicians' rights to conscience and also ensures that patients have access to high-quality end-of-life care as well as medical assistance in dying.

This is a very sensitive and challenging issue that we are dealing with here in this Legislature. We have an opportunity to do the right thing by the people that we represent, and I hope we will do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. I'm glad that we had the UC to let him speak to the bill today because he brought something to the debate that's very important that we haven't talked about as much: the people, the personal experience of the person who wants the service or feels like they want to take their own life.

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One of the things that always sticks in my head is isolation. Isolation is the most common underlying cause of bad health. Being alone, not having access to other people, not having access to the resources that you need—that's a scary thing, when we think about how we're going forward.

Conscience rights: I believe in the rights of conscience. No one is going to be able to pull that lever; they're not going to be forced to do that.

What's at debate here is how we create the pathways to ensure that people have access to the service and that people can have their rights of conscience. It's not an easy thing to do, but we have to find a way to do that. I do not believe that inserting competing amendments on either one of those in the bill will be a way to satisfy that. I believe there are other ways of doing that, and we're working on that. We've expressed that in debate; we've talked about care coordination. I believe there are ways of doing that. It's critical for us to understand that, because if we go into a polarized debate, where we have two groups that are polarized on either side, and we pick one over the other, it's not going to work really well.

This whole thing is going to evolve. I'll repeat again: It's eight months old, and it's incumbent upon us, as legislators, to try to create that space that will help us all come through this together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I appreciate the respectful tone that many members have had in their speeches, not just today but in the other days that we've debated this bill.

I think the member from Ottawa South, who just preceded me, mentioned that this will evolve. Well, more and more in this debate, we're hearing from people in our communities about what they would like to see in Bill 84.

I mentioned last week a physician who came to see me, Dr. Drijber, who the member for Haldimand–Norfolk and I share. He came with a particular perspective, as a palliative care doctor, that I think we need to have more of in this debate.

I, like many members, appreciate the feelings in our community about support for palliative care. We just had the 34th annual 30-hour palliative care telethon in my riding; it happened at the end of February. They set a new record: They raised locally, just in a 30-hour period, \$250,947. I want to thank Bruce Wylie, the host, and all of the team. That's the importance of palliative care in my riding.

In terms of this, nobody in the government is going to be surprised at what I say. I said it after the hour-long lead that the member for Ottawa South had as the parliamentary assistant, I said it when Minister Hoskins spoke, and I'll say it again today to the Minister of the Environment: We have to see that this government is willing to put an amendment forward in this bill to deal with conscience rights. We want to see it. I personally feel that if we don't see it, then we should table a private member's bill that puts it in. That's my personal feeling. I do think that rather than words like "evolve," we need to see this government take our comments and our communities' comments seriously. So I'd like to see that commitment from this government this morning, that they will put an amendment in this bill to deal with conscience rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for final comments.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the members for Leeds–Grenville, Ottawa South, London West and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I just have a couple of points, because I agree with what you said.

I think the point I'm trying to make is that as this gets implemented—and to the point that the member for Leeds–Grenville just made—if we are actually doing this in a way such that the affirmation of life and the forces to choose life are as strong as or stronger than the ones that lead to the conclusion and end of life, being respectful of the dignity that the member for London West says everyone should have—I'm not sure how you do that.

There are many double-edged swords here. In the days when we had very limited health care supports, we had

physicians who would not provide care for people with AIDS and HIV on moral grounds or for fear of infection.

My partner is a nurse. We would often talk about your responsibility to take care of people. I was in hospitals where people had biohazard signs on their door and literally had to crawl out of their bed to get their food, because people were too afraid. A lot of the people who were providing care were other gay men, because we just assumed we were positive, and we weren't afraid of taking care of that.

We have had Zika, AIDS, Lyme disease—now going north—West Nile and SARS. The possibility of a health crisis that could bring on a different type of context in the next 10 years is at least as likely, with climate change and the movement of viruses and some of the ecological imbalances, and we may yet again confront in the not-too-distant future another health crisis that is hard to imagine right now, with some catastrophic pieces.

But it's an issue of conscience, and it is complex on both sides. It is our ability to care for each other and affirm life as an underpinning that I think will get us to where we need to go. Hopefully, we won't polarize that debate, because I don't think any of us really have clear answers to those things.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure to be able to rise today and offer a few comments on Bill 84. In the context of the last few speakers, I am going to respond to some of the issues that were raised there before I look at some of the technicalities of the bill.

I think what I get from the comments that have been made here this morning is that we are struggling with a fundamental difference between the mechanics of process and the emotional realities of the circumstances that surround the bill. So I think we need to be sure that we are not confusing those two things, that you have a piece of legislation that provides and recognizes the process, the mechanical process—who is in, who is out; when you can talk to a coroner; when people must come to some certainty on what they're going to do—and then the unexpected consequences of this, which is of course the emotional.

I think it's almost humorous, the way in which people generally think about their lives and the fact that they don't go on forever. Somehow, that message escapes people. I see it in a number of ways. My husband's family has always had places in this local country cemetery, and there are about three generations, at least, that are there. When I tell people that he is on the cemetery board, it's like, "Why would do you that?" "Well, because you're going to need it one day." And people are like, "Oh, oh, much too morbid." We kind of kick the tires and say, "Well, we have also bought our plots." "You've what?!"

There's a fundamental negation of this reality in the world in which we live. Certainly, if you were to watch any television, you would know that there are millions of people engaged in the business of keeping you looking

good and maybe scaring off the reality that will come to all of us.

I think that this piece of legislation has concentrated, as it should, on the mechanics, but we as legislators have to remember the human side of this and what kinds of benefits we must put in place that would recognize the difficulties that people face in this period of time.

I've always said that I want to find the ice floe. That takes care of you and everything else, and off you go. But not everybody has that kind of a view towards this, and many don't have a view until it's very late in the process.

If nothing else happens in this bill, the fact that people are now discussing the questions around dying, the questions around medical assistance in dying—because it jolts you; you actually have to think about it and what kind of reaction you would have—I think that is one of the most important parts of this bill.

But the other one is to differentiate between the mechanics and the emotional, and the realities of the emotional—the surprises, quite frankly, that come with the emotional that you are unaware of.

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I think it's very difficult, when you look at this, medical assistance in dying, that you have an entire body of medical experts whose whole career has been centred around helping people who are ill. It's a Ministry of Health, and so there is the problem that each individual person who is involved in the process of making you feel better and making you better all of a sudden has to look at a different approach. My sister, who is a retired nurse, made that comment to me, but I know that it's shared by many medical practitioners of all different areas of this. There's an immediate internal contradiction for them.

I think there is also a considerable concern over what kinds of opportunities exist. I think one of the areas that we should be looking at more carefully is the Alberta method, where the question of being party to something that you don't want to be party to is dealt with in a very public way. I think the process that Alberta has is one that we have an opportunity to look at at this point. Here, Alberta has adopted an alternative to effective referral. Certainly, there has been much discussion around the issue of effective referral and whether it actually is a way that can make it more difficult for the health care providers as a question of conscience. So we have to look at other jurisdictions.

Alberta offers care-coordinated service. Patients will have access to a single point of contact for all end-of-life options. I think that also helps in creating a more realistic response to the issues around medically assisted. These services, then, connect patients to health care providers who can best meet their unique needs. In Alberta, they advise patients to speak with their normal health care provider about receiving medical assistance in dying. If the physician does not provide this service, they can contact the Medical Assistance in Dying Care Coordination Service through telephone or by email.

It seems to me that this will do a number of things. One is to make access available very easily in an initial

and kind of coordinated way. At the same time, you're finding out, but you are not giving away your own emotional sensitivities on this issue. You are not having to talk to somebody face to face with a topic that you are uncomfortable with. As well, this protects the patient's conscience rights, as well as ensuring a patient will be able to access the services they're requesting.

In my opinion, Ontario's legislation needs this kind of balance. It's a very delicate topic, and there is no way to come to a conclusion that will make every person happy. But I think the important thing is that the arm's-length process that Alberta has introduced reduces the level of emotion that is going to naturally be part of any conversation. It's like phoning Telehealth. It's sort of an anonymous process where you can find something out. People need that anonymity when they are first faced with the question of whether they want to seek this as a solution.

In Ontario, I think we have an opportunity to create the kind of balance that appears to be in the Alberta model and, in that way, we've created a system which has the services available for those who wish, and it does not force the medical practitioner into being on this side of the argument or on this side of the argument. There is no question about the question of an argument or the question of an issue that doesn't respect everyone.

I think it's very important for us to look at it in that context and remember that emotion is very, very strong and it needs room to come to terms. People need to come to terms with the emotional side before they can adequately look at what are the technical things they should be dealing with in making a decision.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member.

VISITORS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: On a point of order. I know after the break we'll be honouring Canadian women in military service but I just want to draw your attention to a couple of visitors in the east gallery. The president of the Ontario command of the Royal Canadian Legion, Brian Weaver, is here and I believe so is the first vice-president, Sharon McKeown. Thank you very much and welcome, again, to Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order, but in this Legislature we do like to recognize our guests.

It is now 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll try to right a wrong; yesterday, I think I had a mispronunciation. On behalf of Mr. Ooster-

hoff, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, I want to introduce guests of page Luca DiPietro: his parents, Franca and Frank DiPietro, and his sister Daria. They're in the members' gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park my neighbour and constituency assistant, Susan Wigg. She's here today for our tribute to women in the military, as she served 35 years in the Corps of Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2016. She was part of the first class of women at the Royal Military College in 1980, where she would later serve as director of cadets. She also represented Canada through a tour of Afghanistan, and four years in NATO's strategic headquarters.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature members of the Canadian Armed Forces from HMCS York, the Lorne Scots, 32 Service Battalion, Queen's York Rangers, 32 Signal Regiment, Queen's Own Rifles, Canadian Forces College and the 4th Canadian Division headquarters.

Representatives are also here today from the Royal Canadian Legion, St. John Ambulance, the Royal Canadian Military Institute, and the Commissionaires Great Lakes.

I'm also proud to welcome to the Legislature some female veterans from the Second World War: Helen Kerr, June Rudd, Clara Bateman, Sybil McClure, Beatrice Armstrong, Margaret Orr and Ethel Wood. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of New Democrats and our leader, Andrea Horwath, we would like to welcome all those who served in past theatres of war, the Second World War on, especially those women who gave selflessly through that entire process. As a former member of the armed forces, I'd like to welcome you here.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I'd like to welcome a guest from Hearst this morning, Mayor Roger Sigouin. Thanks for joining us.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, as a former legislative page myself, I'm very honoured to recognize the page captain today from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex: Anellah Orosz. Her mother and brother are here, Nikki and Deklan; as well as her grandparents Natalie and William; and her aunt and cousin, Natalie and Daveigh Fletcher. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome the many workers who are here today from OPSEU for social services day, and a special welcome to Nathan and Leah. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to introduce Nicholas Schalfhauser, who is a legislative page this session for Halton. Nicholas is today's page captain as well. His family is here to be with him today. Welcome to Julie Wilson, Peter Schalfhauser, Jonathan Schalfhauser, Jennifer Grigor and Evan Grigor. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to welcome members of OPSEU who were here today to meet with me to talk about the importance of social services in our communities: Brenda Malott, Heather Fathi and Roz Gunn. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to welcome all of the folks from military who are here with us today, being from Northumberland–Quinte West, the biggest military instalment in my riding. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I had breakfast this morning with Deb Gordon from Sarnia–Lambton, from OPSEU. I would also like to welcome Clarke Eaton from OPSEU.

Up in the east gallery there is the president of the Ontario Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, Brian Weaver. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Liz Sandals: On behalf of my colleague the MPP for Mississauga South, the Minister of Finance, I would like to introduce the guests of another page captain, Connor Ludwig. Visiting Connor today we have grade 8 teacher Mrs. Westwater and all of Connor's classmates.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really honoured today to have Kathy Mann from our riding and also her mother, Margaret Orr, who is 93 and is here for the war brides tribute. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M. Gilles Bisson: J'aimerais être capable de reconnaître M. Roger Sigouin, le maire de Hearst, qui est ici avec nous aujourd'hui.

Mr. Arthur Potts: On behalf of the Minister of Finance and his constituents, I'd like to welcome the girls school Holy Name of Mary. They're here for question period today. Welcome.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to welcome Heather Derks, her son Jackson and daughter Heron, who are here to stop the closure of Sparta Public School.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have one last introduction. A former member is with us in the gallery: from Burlington in the 40th Parliament, Jane McKenna. Welcome.

I would like to recognize the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock on a point of order.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I believe you will find there is unanimous consent that each party be permitted to speak for up to five minutes to pay tribute to the women who served in the military in the Second World War.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Agreed. I will turn to the third party.

WOMEN VETERANS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is my great privilege to rise today on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus to pay tribute to the often under-recognized contributions of the courageous women who served in the military during World War II. On the eve of International Women's Day, it is fitting that we honour these remarkable woman veterans—heroes—from the Second World War.

In particular, I want to talk a bit about June Rudd, Helen Kerr and Clara Bateman. These trail-blazing

women in uniform paved the way not only for Canadian women in the military, but for the struggle for women's equality in Canada and the achievement of women's rights.

Canadian women first contributed to the military during World War I as nurses tending to the sick and wounded. Their wartime service and sacrifice, in addition to political considerations related to support for the war effort, led to the federal government's decision in 1917 to grant suffrage to women working in the armed forces and the wives, mothers and sisters of soldiers overseas.

During World War II, Canadian women successfully lobbied the government to form military organizations for women, to allow them to play an active role in the war. In 1941–42, the military was forever changed with the creation of women's forces, allowing women to serve our country in uniform for the first time in the air force, army and navy.

The war years saw more than 50,000 Canadian women serving as transport drivers, cooks, clerks, typists, stenographers, messengers, mechanics, parachute riggers, wireless operators, intelligence officers, weather observers, pharmacists, photographers and more. World War II women veterans fixed airplanes. They flew Spitfires. They broke codes and they managed offices.

Yet despite this broad array of roles and despite the significance of these contributions, women's involvement in military efforts was essentially predicated on the availability of men. Women were allowed to fill military roles not because of the skills they brought to these positions, but because men were not available. Recruitment advertisements reinforced this devaluing of women's skills. The armed forces advertised for women to serve so that men may fight. The air force advertised for women to serve so that men might fly.

Women in World War II struggled for equality in a military system that applied different criteria to their eligibility, limited their job opportunities once they had joined and paid them lower wages. Initially, military women earned two thirds of a man's salary, with the rationale that it took three women to replace two men. This was later increased to four fifths, the difference justified this time by the fact that women did not serve at the front.

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It was not until later in the century that military women were valued for their own skills and contributions instead of as replacement workers for men, when the government made the decision in 1965 to make permanent the employment of women in the Canadian military.

This morning, we are recognizing the pioneering women from World War II who helped open the door for the many women who served in later conflicts and peacekeeping missions and who now make up 15% of today's Canadian Forces.

The first is June Rudd. Like many young British women during the war, June Rudd joined the Women's Royal Naval Service, or Wrens, in 1943. At her first station near Liverpool, she was responsible for typing

and staffing the telephone. Later, she trained in coding and ciphering for naval communication. At Southwick House, the manor house requisitioned as the advance command post for the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, she was involved in planning for Operation Overlord. In the months after D-Day, June would then follow the Allies through liberated Europe.

The Crestwood School website posts video interviews of June sharing her incredible war stories with a grade 9 student. June recounts her involvement in the liberation of Paris and describes riding through the French country with a young boy who borrowed a plane without permission.

June has maintained many of the friendships that she developed during the war and belongs to the Naval Association of Toronto, where she is held in the highest esteem. June, we thank you and salute you for your service.

Helen Kerr grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan and served as a first lieutenant in the Canadian Army Medical Corps during the Second World War. Her training as a nurse at an Ontario mental hospital was put to the test while tending to wounded Allied soldiers at the front in France, and later in army hospitals in England.

Following the war, she worked as an RN in London and in Toronto, and was recently recognized with the French Legion of Honour medal in recognition of her service in France. Helen Kerr remains an active member of Pickering Branch 606 of the Royal Canadian Legion and a women's auxiliary volunteer. Helen, we thank you and salute you for your service.

Finally, Clara Bateman was born in England and enlisted in the Wrens at age 17, after convincing her sister to forge their mother's name on the enrolment papers. She served as a clerk in the supply department and was stationed at HMS Daedalus, one of the primary shore airfields. There, she has vivid memories of the tanks, equipment and personnel that filled the station during D-Day preparations. She was recently awarded a Royal Canadian Legion Branch 228, Stirling, life membership in recognition of 45 years of dedicated service to the branch. Clara, we thank you and salute you for your service.

I am so proud today to recognize these three brave women and all the women who served, to honour their sacrifice and to celebrate their contribution to advancing the rights of women to full and equal participation in society, on our front lines and around the world. Thank you.

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: This week, we celebrate the accomplishments of women, and I'm honoured to pay tribute to the 10,000 women who are part of our Canadian Forces. Many may be surprised to learn that women first served in the Canadian military during the 1885 North-West Rebellion, when 12 women served in military hospitals.

While on occasion men would lie about their age to enlist in the military, women had to at times lie about

their gender and cross-dress in order to be able to serve in military missions. Imagine being so compelled to give the ultimate in public service that you would lie about your gender. Just imagine that resolve for a moment. A woman's commitment and determination to serve knows no bounds when you consider the additional internal and external obstacles of all kinds that they face once they are there.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge 94-year-old Bea Corbett from Kingston, who was honoured last year with the Bletchley Park commemorative badge for her efforts in the Second World War. Bea was a member of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, or the Wrens, as they were affectionately known in the navy world. She earned a degree in English from Queen's University, enlisted in 1944 and completed her basic training. Bea was a telegraph operator whose job was to break the Japanese equivalent of the Morse code. Her work allowed the Allies to find positions of the Japanese ships and to destroy them, and notified the Allies that they were planning an attack.

Over the years, I've known many women who have enlisted and done their basic training at CFB Kingston, such as Edyta Sklodowska, an immigrant from Poland. She came to Canada, knowing little English, and decided at the age of 40, with two children and on her own, that she was going to serve her new country.

Women in the military, past and present, continue to break ground for women's advancement, not only in Canada but in every region in the world.

I acknowledge trailblazers in our Canadian Forces, such as Wafa Dabbagh, the first Muslim woman to wear a head covering while serving in the Canadian Forces, or Kingston's own Dorothy Hector, one of the first 32 women who attended Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston. I have always been inspired by my good friend Susan Long-Poucher, who became the lieutenant commander of HMCS Catarqui in 2009.

These women provide critical intelligence; they serve on the front lines as medical personnel and in combat missions; and they support humanitarian causes as peacekeepers. Just like the men that they work alongside, they put public safety, and the safety and well-being of others, above all else.

We recognize their efforts past and present. We know they would like to be acknowledged for their accomplishments over their gender, but this week, we also acknowledge women in the military for their profound and inspirational legacy that they leave behind for others.

We are indebted to you for your service, your fortitude and your leadership. Thank you.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm honoured to stand today in the House, on behalf of our Progressive Conservative caucus, to pay tribute to the remarkable women who served our country during the Second World War.

We are humbled by the fact that we owe our vibrant parliamentary democracy in no small part to the sacri-

fices made by Canadian women and men in uniform. Indeed, we owe them our very lives and freedoms.

Women were involved in the war effort from the very beginning. During both world wars, women served an integral role as nurses, both overseas and at home.

Nearly 3,000 women served as nursing sisters, or “bluebirds,” during the First World War. Not only did they serve on the front lines as part of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, but the bluebirds were also integral to paving the way for women’s suffrage in Canada. In 1917, an exception to Canadian law was made that allowed the bluebirds stationed in Europe to vote. They became the first Canadian women to cast ballots, a year before women across Canada were granted the same right in 1918. This year, 100 years on, we commemorate this milestone of civic engagement for women as a hallmark of our democracy.

The Second World War saw women serving in other military capacities for the very first time. The women’s division of the Royal Canadian Air Force was established in 1941 and was quickly followed by the Canadian Women’s Army Corps and Women’s Royal Canadian Naval Service.

Tens of thousands of women served in the military. Their contribution was crucial to the Canadian and Allied victory in 1945, and their courage is exemplified by the veterans we are lucky to have with us in the Speaker’s gallery today.

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Let me tell you a few of their stories. Clara Bateman served in the Wrens, the Women’s Royal Naval Service, during the war. Clara enlisted, as was said, underage at 17, having hidden her true age from recruiters. She was stationed at HMS Daedelus, a Royal Naval Air Station at Lee-on-Solent in England, where she worked as a clerk in the supply department. She remembers the incredible busyness in the lead-up to D-Day, as the base overflowed with tanks, equipment and people.

There is also Helen Kerr, who served as a first lieutenant in Canadian army hospitals during the war. Mrs. Kerr was just 25 years old when Canadian forces landed on Juno Beach. That day, 359 Canadians lost their lives, and First Lieutenant Helen Kerr was one of those sent to provide care to the wounded.

I also would like to take this opportunity to remember Billy Pickard, a World War II veteran in my riding in Haliburton. Billy was one of only 20 postal workers stationed in Europe during the war. She and her 19 colleagues ensured that families were able to communicate with their loved ones in the service. I thank Billy for her service, as well as her dedicated contribution to the Haliburton Legion for many years.

We also have June Rudd, Sybil McClure, Beatrice Armstrong, Margaret Orr and Ethel Wood, as well as many of their family members, with us today. Thank you for sharing this moment with us here in the Legislature.

It’s wonderful that we are joined by many women who are currently serving in our military and members of our beloved Royal Canadian Legions across the province.

Thank you to the sailors, soldiers and aviators. You are carrying on a proud legacy.

On behalf of the entire PC caucus, I offer my sincere gratitude and admiration to all the women veterans here today. Thank you for your service to your country. Each and every one of you is a true Canadian hero.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their sincere and heartfelt comments. My personal comment is that women, along with men, have had to see and do things that no one should have to do, and you’ve carried that with such grace over all these years. I call it the black spot, the dark spot, on your soul that you’ve carried for us. We are indebted to you forever. Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Simcoe county and my hometown of Barrie have been hit hard by this government’s attitude towards small-town schools. The village of Port McNicoll lost their school. Waubaushene lost both their Catholic and public elementary schools. Barrie Central closed its doors.

This Liberal government needs to re-evaluate its priorities before any more communities are hurt. Will this government agree with our call for an immediate moratorium on school closures?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me begin by saying that I understand how difficult it is to manage facilities, to manage schools in an environment where, in many parts of the province, we’re seeing declining enrolment. It’s a fundamental challenge for school boards.

Let me say secondly that I believe in school boards. I believe in school boards as important parts of the democratic system in communities. In fact, school boards were elected bodies in Ontario before municipal councils. They were the first entities that communities came together to elect. So I believe that school boards are fundamental in making decisions locally.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, we actually put a moratorium on school closures because of the ravages of the previous government on school closures around the province. There were hundreds of schools being closed, and we put a moratorium on it.

I’ll have more to say about that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier. I spoke at the final delegation meeting last week, before Upper Canada trustees decided the fate of one in four elementary schools in my riding. I was so impressed by the alternatives put forward by school communities and the offers of support from municipalities and businesses. It shows what’s possible when our rural schools are seen as a unique and valuable asset, not a liability.

My communities have plans to keep their rural schools viable. It’s bad enough this government is asking parents,

mayors and business leaders to fix the broken education system. Will the Premier support a moratorium on school closures and give these great ideas a chance to work?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite is going to be very pleased at the letter that the Minister of Education sent out yesterday to boards.

There are situations around the province where a community has gone through a process and there is a plan for a consolidation or a closure of a school and a new school being built, where actually things are moving ahead very well.

There are other situations where there hasn't been the kind of consultation between boards or with the municipality that should have happened and that the ministry has, for some time, expressed a very clear preference for.

The letter went out to directors yesterday. What we're saying is, where those conversations haven't happened, where the school boards haven't had a conversation either with each other—because as you know we have four systems in the province, Mr. Speaker—or where the municipalities and the boards have not spoken, we need to allow the opportunity for that to happen.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. The requirements of northern and rural schools are very different than those of urban centres. These schools have small populations, and when they're put under review and compared to larger institutions, they often fail to match up. Blanket regulations created by this government put these schools at a clear disadvantage. Rural schools fall outside of the government's mould and are at high risk of closure. They're smaller and much farther apart, and because of their locations, these buildings don't just serve as schools, they're also our community hubs.

My question to the Premier is: Will she give northern schools the unique attention they deserve?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The hundreds of millions of dollars that we have had in place for a number of years to actually support northern and rural schools, to allow them to weather the buffeting of declining enrolment, were put in place exactly for that, Mr. Speaker.

What I want folks to know now is that we recognize that there are some situations where boards haven't had enough of an opportunity to work together, or boards haven't had enough of an opportunity to work with municipalities to come up with some of the community solutions that we know are possible.

Right now, there are 4,900 publicly funded schools in Ontario. Only 39 of those—or 37, I think—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's 39.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—so 39; only 39 of those are collaborations between boards. We think there can be more of those, and we want to give boards some time to develop those collaborations.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Gila Martow: Again to the Premier: When I took office three years ago, this government offered to

find creative ways to keep our schools open. One of their repeated suggestions was to turn our schools into community hubs, make them the heart of their communities. Unfortunately, they never followed through, and as a result entire communities are being decimated.

In my riding of Thornhill, Stornoway Crescent Public School has been slated to close, even though young families are moving into the area. The Premier needs to admit that these constant announcements of school closures force panicked communities to huddle together in protest. Are protest rallies outside our schools really what this Premier had in mind as community hubs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, for a number of years we have had in place, through the Ministry of Education, policy guidelines to encourage the conversation between school boards and between school boards and municipalities, and in some situations that has happened. I will just say, Mr. Speaker, oftentimes an MPP can play a very constructive role in bringing people to the table and establishing those conversations. That can be a very, very important role for school trustees and MPPs.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You know, a Premier can even do a better job, so institute the moratorium and get the conversation started.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order. Thank you.

A wrap-up sentence, please.

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So there are situations where those collaborations have happened, but there are some situations where there has been a reluctance, either on the part of a particular school board or a municipality. That needs to happen going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary question? The member for Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Premier. Many constituents in my riding are concerned as schools in their local communities are being considered for closure by this Liberal government; in Durham region in particular, Epsom Public School in Scugog and Thorah Central Public School in Brock. I'm hearing from parents that this government's school closure review process is a sham. The Ontario Alliance Against School Closures has said that this review process is just a democratic facade and that parents are being heard but not listened to.

Will the Premier put in place a moratorium on rural school closures and stop ignoring these parents' concerns?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I put a challenge out to every MPP in this Legislature: A letter has gone out from the Minister of Education and from the Minister of Rural Affairs to say to school boards, "You have an opportunity now. We have a community hubs adviser. There are conversations that can happen in communities." I say to all MPPs that where those conversations are not happening, they should be happening. If there's an opportunity for a creative collaboration, municipality to school board, we will be looking at those. The Minister of Education will facilitate those conversations.

But it behooves school trustees, school boards, municipalities and community groups to work together for the best of the community. That's a much more productive process than the blunt instrument of a moratorium that does not recognize the individual opportunities in every community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary? The member for Scarborough–Rouge River.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: My question is to the Premier. I attended three community meetings at three different Catholic schools in my riding. Parents are deeply concerned that their children's school will be closed. No consideration is given to the distance these kids have to travel to the new school. No consideration is given to the fact that schools with a large number of students limit potential for kids to participate in school sports. No consideration is given to students with special needs.

Why would you put students and their families through all this, Premier? Why won't you introduce a moratorium on school closures?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to the member opposite for that question. Attending those discussions among schools is exactly what you should be doing in terms of hearing from the school board and the school board hearing from the local community in terms of what is the best plan for this community.

As the Premier has said, the role of locally elected school boards is vital to local communities. The reason we have the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline is to ensure that those meaningful conversations take place, because these decisions are very difficult decisions. Whether they're occurring—anywhere in the province, they are very difficult decisions, and it's important that that input is had from all parts of the community. That is exactly what is happening with these conversations that are occurring: ensuring that, as school boards are required to make the decisions, they get that input from all parts of the community.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier has dubbed her band-aid solution to the hydro crisis in Ontario the fair hydro plan—odd, because she didn't even mention the completely unfair mandatory time-of-use pricing that Ontario families and businesses have been suffering under.

How can the Premier claim her plan is fair when it leaves seniors and young parents at home with their kids to pay more while lining the pockets of her friends on Bay Street?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Energy is going to want to speak to the work that he's doing to look at the market pricing and to look at if there are ways of providing options to people.

The fair hydro plan in Ontario is about taking an average of 25% off the bill of every one of those people

that the leader of the third party identified. That is fair. It's also fair that people who are living in rural and more remote areas and are paying disproportionately high distribution charges would have relief as well. It's also fair that people who are living on low income would have extra support. That's what makes the fair hydro plan fair.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, I visited Versatile Inn in Sarnia and spoke with the owner, a woman named Mehru Malik. Mehru told me all about her nearly-\$8,000 hydro bill. Mehru wants relief, but the Liberal Party doesn't fix the problems, like unfair mandatory time-of-use pricing.

When will this Premier deal with the important issues in our electricity system, like ending mandatory use pricing, instead of focusing on her political well-being?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise again to talk about the fair hydro plan that's going to be helping every ratepayer across the province with a 25% reduction, as soon as we can get this legislation passed through the House.

It is important to know that time-of-use is something that we've been working on for months. We've recognized that a senior couple living on a fixed income in northern Ontario shouldn't be on the same retail price plan as a single condo dweller living here in downtown Toronto. That's why we asked, months and months ago, for the IESO to start work on this, to start looking at bringing forward some other options besides time-of-use.

But while they're doing that, we continue to act. We brought forward other reductions, and then last week, a 25% reduction for every family across this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A senior sitting at home in Sudbury shouldn't have to wring their hands, worrying about turning the lights on and turning the stove on during the day. That's not fair, Speaker. That's not fair.

Mehru, the woman in Sarnia who runs this hotel, told me that she washes her own towels and pillowcases for the hotel on-site, as a way to save a bit of money. But even that isn't very helpful, because her staff have to do the laundry during the day so that they won't wake up the guests, and that forces her to pay peak electricity prices.

Why didn't this Premier address the unfair time-of-use pricing in her desperate attempt to save her own political skin?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The one thing that's very important to also highlight about our government's fair hydro plan is that it delivers a 25% reduction for not only every household in the province but to half a million small businesses and farms. That is something we should all be proud of.

Not only that, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has highlighted the importance of the small businesses and the challenges they face. Many regional chambers have spoken to us about that, so we listened and we took action.

Every ratepayer who pays time-of-use prices in Ontario will receive the 25% reduction. This includes households, farms, businesses and more. We're very proud of the fair hydro plan.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Last week, I also visited with Cheryl and Scot Ryckman at their farm in Chatham. They told me that they paid \$75,000 in hydro bills last year alone. For a small business, that's a lot to take. The Premier says she's concerned about hydro bills like Scot and Cheryl's, but her plan doesn't give them any long-term protection.

Why is the Premier bringing in a short-term Band-Aid when what she needs—what they need, what Ontario needs—is a long-term fix to the energy system that this Liberal government messed up in the first place?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We're very pleased to be able to stand and talk about the fair hydro plan and how this is going to benefit farms right across the province, farms that will see a 25% reduction in their electricity bills.

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This does much, much more for small businesses right across this province. At the same time, those businesses that are larger, those businesses like our small manufacturing sector, can now qualify for the enhanced ICI program. That's helping them save up to a third on their energy bill. That's because we've taken action to ensure that we're helping not only residences, not only small businesses, not only farms, but our manufacturing sector and our large businesses as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Scot and Cheryl have reduced their hydro consumption by 40% over the past year, but none of that—none of that—translated into lower electricity bills. The Premier's plan doesn't address time-of-use pricing. It doesn't address bad contracts that she signed. It doesn't address the oversupply of energy that we are paying private and foreign companies to generate, that we don't even use. It doesn't stop the wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One.

Can the Premier explain to small-business owners like the Ryckmans why her plan doesn't address any of the underlying problems in our hydro system and why any relief that comes under her plan will only be temporary?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: What I think the leader of the third party needs to do is put down her plan that doesn't address anything—it doesn't save one cent for families or businesses in this province—and actually look at ours and see what the fair hydro plan does: a 25% reduction for small businesses, farms and residences right across the province, and the ICI program is enhanced, helping our manufacturing sector and all our businesses.

We're actually helping low-income individuals, which their plan didn't even address until the last page. We're making sure those who are most vulnerable actually get the help that they need. When it comes to our First Nations, those living on-reserve, we are also making sure that there is a new rate for them, that they're getting help. We're actually helping everybody in the province, unlike the opposition over on that side.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nobody believes for a minute anything that came out of the mouth of that minister a moment ago because it's totally nowhere near the reality of what occurred last week.

Here is the reality, though: The Liberal plan does nothing more than make a last-ditch effort on behalf of this government, this Premier and her political party that's trying to hold on to power here in this province for just a little bit longer. Mehru Malik knows it. The Ryckmans know it. In fact, everybody in Ontario saw it for exactly what it was last week.

When will this Premier stop putting the interests of her banker friends and her political party ahead of the interests of small businesses, family, industry and mining in the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about—

Interjection.

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

I'm going to turn to the dean of the House to let him know I know the trick of turning your back to the Speaker and speaking into the microphone that has been turned on. I would appreciate it if you would cease doing so.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've been around long enough.

Minister.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Let's talk about who else is talking about the fair hydro plan and all of its benefits. Francesca Dobbyn, the executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey: "This shows Kathleen Wynne's government is listening to people. With these positive changes, our rural community will now truly benefit from the low-cost power it produces."

Isadore Day, the Ontario regional chief: "The elimination of the delivery charge will assist our citizens by reducing energy poverty in our communities. It also represents recognition for the use of the land in the development and expansion of the provincial energy grid... Today's commitment by the Ontario government is commendable and allows a path forward for greater quality of life for First Nations in Ontario."

Mr. Speaker, I can keep going on the number of quotes that we have here.

Interjection: Keep going.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Well, I'll do so, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Well, I know I won't have time, but I'll look forward to talking about more in some of my supplementaries.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, last night I attended the final meeting where delegates' desperate plea to save St. Agatha elementary school could be heard again by the Waterloo Catholic board. It's the third time in nine years that parents have had to fight to save their beloved St. Agatha school. It was just over two years ago that parents thought they could breathe easier after their last battle to save St. Agatha had finally come to an end. Yet, there they were again last night making the same arguments to save the same rural school this government's new review rules allowed to be placed right back on the chopping block.

Speaker, it's cruel and unfair to expect parents and communities to fight on an almost annual basis to keep their school doors open. Will the Premier end the constant battle faced by rural students, parents and communities like mine in Wilmot and St. Agatha, and will she call for an immediate moratorium on rural school closures?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise and to talk about the fact that we are investing in schools right across this province because we know that every student in Ontario deserves the best education possible.

When a decision has to be made and a board and a community come together to make a very tough decision about the change of a school, whether it's the closure of a school, the consolidation—or in the instance I know of with the member from Peterborough, we announced two schools coming together to form one new school because that is in the best interests of the students and the local community.

An arbitrary moratorium is not the answer. We want to ensure that our elected trustees can make decisions locally that are in the best interests of their communities with, of course, the meaningful input provided by all sides of the community to make those tough decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is to the Premier. This government is now planning to close up to four Forest-area schools, pulling students out of their communities to take long bus rides to attend a super-school, the first in Lambton county to have students from kindergarten through grade 12 in the same building.

At the direction of the provincial government, the Lambton Kent District School Board has closed 14 elementary schools, three high schools and one adult learn-

ing centre. These buildings are important to the health and future prosperity of these communities.

Will the Premier finally recognize the vital importance of rural and small-town schools to the social and economic life of their communities and place a moratorium on school closures until the funding formula can be fixed?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we know that schools are vital to the social fabric of our communities. That is why we are asking boards and municipalities to work together. We're also asking boards to work with each other. The coterminous boards and communities can come together to talk about the joint use of school spaces; to talk about, how do we serve the needs of this local community in the best way possible, on behalf of the students in our community as well as on behalf of the community as a whole?

We recognize that in rural communities there needs to be greater investment. That is exactly what we have done. Through the Grants for Student Needs, we have funded our rural and our northern schools to a greater degree.

We put standards in place to ensure that every student in Ontario gets the best education possible, and we're going to continue to make those investments.

CANCER TREATMENT

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

Speaker, the last thing that cancer patients and their family want to hear is that their treatment will be delayed. Just think about it: You have cancer, your life depends on prompt treatment, and you're told that you will have to wait; that there's a chemotherapy drug shortage. That's exactly what's happening right here in Ontario. Now we know that at least 35 people in Richmond Hill have had their cancer treatments delayed. Yesterday, the minister said that he knew nothing about the chemo drug shortage.

Will the minister tell us how many cancer patients across Ontario have suffered delays in their cancer treatments and how many hospitals have been impacted by this drug shortage?

1120

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the opportunity to address this extremely important issue. The member opposite is correct that we did see, for a brief period of time here in Ontario, a shortage of a particular drug called 5-FU, which is used for treating cancer, particularly gastrointestinal, breast and other related cancers. This was the result of a shipment that was provided through Health Canada and was put in quarantine because of some concern about the integrity of the vials that contain the cancer drug itself.

The federal government—I think the member opposite probably saw their press release yesterday—as a result of this shortage, which was a federal issue as a result of the quarantine of the supply, released 3,000 vials that they

had deemed to have sufficient integrity, which they are confident will result in no further shortage until the manufacturer is able to provide additional vials in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I understand that Health Canada has taken steps to try to fix the shortage, at least in the short term, but it doesn't explain how the Minister of Health wasn't even aware that it was going on.

When cancer patients are forced to delay their treatments because of a shortage of chemo drugs, this is as close to life and death as you can get. I would think that the Minister of Health would want to know about such a failure of our health care system, so that he can take steps to correct it.

My question is simple, Speaker: When was the Ministry of Health informed of this drug shortage, and why did it take so long for the minister to find out about it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It is important that Ontarians have the facts. Cancer Care Ontario was informed by the hospital in question on Friday. I was asked about this Monday morning, just after question period. When they were notified, Cancer Care Ontario notified the Ministry of Health of this federal issue, Mr. Speaker, that has been addressed over the course of a weekend to the point where, at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon, the vials had been released.

But it does point to an important issue, and that is the coordination of all parties. Certainly, if a hospital is anticipating a shortage of medicines, they need to get in touch with the Ministry of Health, with Cancer Care Ontario—with the federal government, as in this case—so we can address that promptly, prior to it becoming an issue.

We also have a system through CCO where, once they're informed, they look at the entire province-wide inventory. In this case, they would have been able to reallocate vials that are available through other hospitals to the needy hospital.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, I know that over the course of this and the last session, we have heard false statements from the opposition, claiming that we have increased tax for on-site craft distillers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. I'd ask the member to withdraw.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Withdraw.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know that this could not be further from the truth. We know that the recent changes introduced in Bill 70 will actually make craft distillers better off, increasing the revenue margins from sales at on-site stores from 39% to 45%.

Could the minister please explain what other supports we are offering to this growing industry, and how they will help small distillers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would like to thank the member from Davenport for the question. I'd also like to thank her for clarifying a very important point. As we have stated time and time again, we are committed to helping Ontario's small businesses scale up, and we're committed to investing in our rapidly growing community of small cider and small spirits producers.

In fact, just this morning, I was at the LCBO, alongside Minister Leal, MPP Martins and MPP Arthur Potts, to announce our government's new support program for small cider producers and small distilleries. Mr. Speaker, this new program will invest \$4.9 million over three years between the craft cider and spirits sectors. That means that a producer could receive as much as \$220,000 in funding per year. It's a program that will help to support growing cideries and craft distilleries to hire more staff, buy more equipment and secure more funding for on-site stores.

Mr. Speaker, these changes are good for business, good for consumers and good for Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to hear that the government is taking steps to support these growing industries. I was pleased to join Minister Sousa, Minister Leal and my colleague the MPP for Beaches—East York at the announcement this morning.

I know that Yongehurst Distillery, who was at the announcement this morning, from my riding of Davenport, have already expressed their contentment with the exciting changes that we are making to this industry.

I know that beyond my riding of Davenport, there are cider producers and distillers that play a critical role in local economies across the province. It's clear that this support will help increase the availability of locally produced spirits and ciders for Ontario consumers.

Could the minister please share with the House why this government is launching this new program, and how these businesses are using other Ontario products?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a private member's bill on Thursday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Leeds—Grenville, come to order.

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, it's true, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Leeds—Grenville, second time—could be three. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I just want to assure the good folks in the Peterborough riding that I wasn't imbibing at the LCBO this morning at 9 a.m. I was just there for an announcement.

I want to thank the member for her advocacy work on this particular file, but I also want to acknowledge the good work that was done by the member from Beaches—East York, Mr. Potts; the member from Dufferin—

Caledon, Ms. Jones; and the member from Niagara Falls, Mr. Gates. Collectively, we've all been working together to make this industry grow in the province of Ontario.

That's why we need to work together to help our small cideries and distilleries scale up, create jobs in their communities and provide customers with locally made choices.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity just yesterday to meet with Charlie Stevens—

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: —the head of the apple growers, and they're very supportive of this program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. We've been at this long enough that I should not have to remind members that when I stand, you sit. When your time is up, it's up.

New question.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Premier: The Ministry of Education has neglected the needs of rural schools for years. Public boards have a mandate to provide education to all students in an area, yet the government makes it impossible to maintain infrastructure, address rising costs or adopt new technologies. Now, when push has come to shove, the Premier points her finger at the boards, and blames them for the problem.

My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry still stands to lose a number of excellent public schools, including Rothwell-Osnabruck and North Stormont Public School, despite dozens of public meetings of up to 1,000 people. These schools offer great education and are important community centres, providing meeting and athletic facilities.

Speaker, when will the Premier show some leadership, discover some commitment to giving our students a good public education close to home and place a moratorium on the 600 school closures until a full review of education funding for rural schools is completed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for this question, because the member opposite and I have actually visited schools in his area and beyond. We've been up and down the concession roads, and he knows that I know and the community knows that schools are a vital part of the communities. That's why these conversations are difficult conversations for local boards.

One of the aspects in the letter that I've sent to the chairs of school boards and to all municipalities, along with Minister Chiarelli, is that boards work together with their local communities and with their municipalities, as well as with the coterminous boards in communities, because we want to ensure that we are making the best possible decision on behalf of the students in that area.

If that means a board can come together with another board for joint use of space, then we will support that,

Mr. Speaker. We have funding in place to support those types of initiatives, and they will be given priority.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you say you got into politics because of education. Well, the people of Paisley feel you have lost your way and are now only concerned about power and serving yourself. They have lost confidence and trust in you.

Last night I got a text from Dale who asked me on behalf of his community to stress the devastation you will cause if you close the only school in town. In Markdale, Chapman's Ice Cream has stepped up to buy the school. The municipality of Grey Highlands has stepped up and invited you and the minister to come and visit, and to actually get out and learn what's happening. The people of Markdale and area have stepped up.

Premier, you have found billions to try to save your political career and take care of your cronies and fix the mistakes you have made. It's never too late to do the right thing. Will you step up? Will you put a moratorium on any more school closures today, and avoid another fatal mistake that will devastate communities across our province?

Interjections.

1130

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

Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, as municipalities, communities and organizations come together with their local school boards to find the best possible solution for their local community, I am confident that they will continue to make good decisions on behalf of their communities, putting the needs of students first—whether that's the great programming that students receive—when they have the necessary investments in their schools.

The student experience and the outcomes for students are extremely important. It's one of the reasons why we sent this letter, to remind school boards of their obligations to meet with local communities so that these great examples can be brought forward and can be supported. That is exactly the intent and that is why an arbitrary moratorium is ill-advised, because these types of conversations would cease in the case of a moratorium. We want to ensure that boards—

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

New question.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. We know that good health outcomes and success in education are determined in large measure by social conditions. Today, we are joined by workers who are here for OPSEU social services day. Among other roles, they work with children with mental health issues. They protect children from neglect and abuse. They assist

adults and children with disabilities, and they support women fleeing violence.

They're asking for a bolder vision on social services that recognizes that children and families have better health and education outcomes when we invest in a strong social safety net. Will the government commit to funding based on that vision and stop cuts to services?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to first start by thanking all of the child protection workers, anyone who works in public education and anyone in this province who works to help our children. I want to thank them for doing what they do because they are, without question, some of the most valuable people in our community.

Mr. Speaker, our government has been working to strengthen, to modernize and to transform our child protection service agencies here in the province of Ontario. The real purpose, at the end of the day, is to make sure that young people have what they need to be successful.

We know that for our children's aid societies, there are high expectations for them to deliver the best services possible. That's why we keep investing. We made sure that we changed the model five years ago to look at meeting the needs of a particular community, rather than just giving money based on historical numbers. The member opposite knows that most of those staffing decisions in our child protection agencies are done locally by the child protection agency.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier. Budgets in child welfare and children's mental health have been flatlined for years, and it's the same story right across our social services: Agencies and workers are having to do more with less. There are 12,000 children and youth waiting for mental health services. Children are moved far from their communities to access residential beds. Women are being turned away at shelters.

I ask again: Will the Premier stop cuts and commit to funding services to ensure that every person in this province gets the services that they need?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Michael Coteau: We've been looking for ways to transform the services that are out there for young people. The member knows that we now have Bill 89, which is going to change the way child protection agencies work here in the province of Ontario. We're looking for ways to ensure that there are less children that go through care.

Over the last several years, we've had a 19% reduction in children using the services through child protection. We have more young people who are being adopted here in the province of Ontario and finding permanent homes.

When it comes to mental health, we do have a strategy in place. We've made a commitment that we'll be looking at the funding formula, but we've just transformed

our system to put lead agencies throughout the province, to ensure that they have the tools necessary. There is a commitment by this government to continue to invest in children, which we have been doing in public education, in child mental health and in child protection services.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. As you know, Minister, I am passionate about addressing youth unemployment and underemployment. That is why I introduced a private member's bill on pathways to post-secondary education which would do just that: create a website to give students the information they need so they can make an informed decision about their future career and post-secondary choices.

Minister, you are responsible for strengthening Ontario's efforts to become the most open and transparent government in Canada. I know this aligns well with the work being done in digital government by Minister Matthews.

This weekend, I represented our government, Minister, at Civic Tech Toronto's CodeAcross hackathon. There, I invited participants to use Ontario's open data to help solve some of the challenges facing our province.

I also invited them to design a tool, similar to that in my private member's bill, that would help students understand labour market demands, the skills they need to achieve those jobs, and the post-secondary programs that would allow them to acquire those skills and ultimately pursue their career goals.

Minister, could you tell us how we are using hackathons like CodeAcross to create value from Ontario's open data to benefit all Ontarians?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke Centre for his enthusiastic support of our open data mandate and for representing our government at CodeAcross. Ontario was a proud sponsor of CodeAcross, a hackathon where citizens come together to collaborate on technology and design solutions based on some of the data sets publicly posted by the Ontario government.

This year, Ontario provided seven challenges to civil society, ranging from the member's challenge to map career pathways to creating an app that assists landlords and tenants in resolving their disputes without having to go through the Landlord and Tenant Board. By the end of the day, wire frames had been worked up for a new health care app to provide users with digital access to their immunization records, and a youth well-being dashboard which would allow users to view youth wellness and employment statistics.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Minister, I know that in Ontario we are already doing tremendous work when it comes to openness and transparency. I actually heard that we were one of 15 subnationals worldwide invited to join the Open Government Partnership, and the only province

invited from Canada. The philosophy that Ontarians can work alongside government to generate ideas is alive and well, and it was alive and well at CodeAcross on Saturday.

I had the opportunity to meet with people like Gabe Sawhney; he's the co-founder of Civic Tech Toronto. I heard about projects like Budgetpedia—it's actually a tool that allows people to visualize Toronto's budget—and DemocracyKit, a project that seeks to support councillors and school board trustees with campaign resources.

Most importantly, I was impressed with Saturday's hackathon because some of Toronto's brightest young people, Minister, came together to find ways of using data made available by our government and innovative technology to solve some of the most important challenges facing our province and every riding across Ontario.

Minister, could you tell us how our government is continuing to work with active and engaged citizens like those represented at CodeAcross on Saturday?

Hon. Liz Sandals: In December, I actually had the opportunity to attend the Open Government Partnership's global summit. The summit involved over 3,000 representatives from 70 countries who gathered to push forward the open government agenda. I was proud to announce that Ontario would be strengthening our commitment to openness by adopting the International Open Data Charter.

Speaker, our open data commitment to increasing access to data has already led to the production of a data catalogue of over 2,000 government data sets, of which we have already published 560 online, data sets that are filling a real need in our society.

Our top 10 most frequently downloaded data sets are quite diverse, and include things like monitoring greenhouse gases emitted from energy and manufacturing facilities, stats on public libraries, and marriage—

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

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, under the Premier's pupil accommodation policies, decided to close Our Lady of Mercy elementary school in Honey Harbour this June. These students will either be bused to St. Antoine Daniel Catholic School in Victoria Harbour or attend Honey Harbour Public School.

Unfortunately, because of this government's flawed accommodation review policies, Honey Harbour Public School is at risk of being closed as well. A final decision is expected next month. Honey Harbour is in danger of losing both its elementary schools in one year.

The Premier must understand just how critical a local school is to a small community. Without a school, they cannot attract families and businesses to locate there.

1140

Will the Premier agree to a moratorium on rural school closures until she can find a way to help communities like Honey Harbour keep at least one school open?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, another great example. The last question from the opposition was also an example, an example where the collaboration between school boards and with municipalities could make a huge difference.

When I was at the ROMA conference and I was talking to municipalities, the municipal leaders were thrilled to hear that we were working with school boards and that we were going to be requiring—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't enter into this one, member. I'm dealing with something else.

The chief government whip is warned, and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We were going to be requiring that school boards work with each other, that the coterminous boards work together. Again, this is a perfect example of where that could happen—and with municipalities, because there are opportunities.

That's why I hope the member is pleased with the letter that has gone out, because we are saying clearly, "If you can find alternate solutions, if you can work together, we're going to work with you. We're going to facilitate that."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm sorry; I didn't hear.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Premier, back in 2014, you were on record as saying that there would be no cuts to schools. Jim Costello, director of education for the Lambton Kent District School Board, is quoted as saying, "Until the ministry changed the funding formula in April 2015, we were able to survive.... A lot of that (funding) has been ... drastically reduced." Schools are struggling to keep up with skyrocketing hydro fees and cap-and-trade costs on natural gas.

I just don't have time to list all the schools in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex that are currently on the chopping block. However, Ridgetown, for example, is very nervous about losing its high school. I should add that busing will also be a huge issue if it closes.

Premier, will you support a moratorium on rural school closures?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say that our commitment to rural schools is firm. Since 2003, we've increased the per pupil funding for rural schools by \$5,007. That's a 67% increase. In fact, we've increased the annual funding to rural boards by \$200 million, and that is regardless of the enrolment levels. We have been

continuously investing in and supporting our rural schools.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, there are discussions that boards need to have regarding their use of schools. Those conversations are happening. We've put in place a Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline that requires boards to work with their local communities and to work with their coterminous boards to make the best decisions possible—

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

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. The processing vegetable sector is extremely important to the economy of southwestern Ontario and to the province. Each year at this time there's a negotiation that goes on between the processors and the farmers. The farmers are represented by the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers. They are a duly elected board. They represent their members. They hold annual meetings. I checked their auditor report and it was clean.

These negotiations sometimes can be tough, as all negotiations are, and sometimes they end up in arbitration, as often negotiations do. That's the spirit of negotiations. But what happened on Friday is that the powers of the board were stripped. The minister removed the board.

Our question is, is that in the best long-term interests of a sector that's vital to the Ontario agricultural economy?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his question this morning.

As Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, one of the most difficult questions I've had to deal with and make a decision on was last Friday. We made a decision to appoint a very distinguished public servant in the province of Ontario, the honourable Elmer Buchanan, to be a trustee.

Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, it was clear to me that an impasse had been reached by the processing vegetable growers of the province of Ontario. The processors said that we had to make a decision so that we would not lose the 2017 crop. This would impact farmers and impact jobs, and we wanted to sustain regulatory marketing in the province of Ontario. That's the decision we made for farmers in—

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

Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Mr. Speaker, the important part of that response is, the minister made the decision. The minister made the decision to strip the powers of the representatives of the OPVG, Ontario Processing Vege-

table Growers, who actually were elected by their members to do those negotiations.

I'm getting emails from vegetable growers wondering where they fit in this, because a public meeting was held where questions from the floor weren't allowed but only to be read. So they're wondering. They have millions of dollars also invested. Where do the farmers fit in this equation? Because they certainly weren't part of the decision to strip the powers of their board.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I thank the member for the supplementary question. I provided him and the critic for the opposition the courtesy of calling them personally, to give them the opportunity to have detailed briefings on this matter—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to reference for the honourable member a letter that was sent to me by the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers on February 22, 2017, when they told me that both sides had reached an impasse. They were asking me to take action, and we took the right action last Friday.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Health. As you know, Minister, I have expressed my deep concern about the fact that, despite the fact we spend \$3.7 billion every year on mental health, we still see our hospitals using electric shock therapy. We see long times for getting an appointment for a psychiatrist. We see 15-year-olds in psych wards in hospitals.

That's why I was so glad that you announced an additional \$140 million to invest in on-the-street mental health care, where you're going to finally have these youth service hubs, one-stop services for our young people, and also have supportive housing and comprehensive psychotherapy.

Can you tell us how this is going to help—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Second reminder: When I stand, you sit.

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for this very, very important question.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Health, I believe that there can be no health without mental health. It's that important. We need to see and look at mental health and physical health as two sides of the same coin. We need to approach mental health with the same vigour that we do physical health in this province.

We have the evidence, and we have the partnerships and the dedicated workforce to deliver the type of high-quality mental health services that Ontarians have come to expect for all other aspects of our health care system.

It's important that Ontarians understand—and I don't think many of us know this—that mental illness results in more person-years lost to death than all forms of cancer combined. It's that important, and it requires the same level of dedication and the same level of investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Minister. As you know, Minister, I've been very concerned about seeing 12-year-olds in our psych wards. That's no place to help young people with mental health issues. That's why I have impressed upon you the need to invest in local services, the service hubs, like I told you about.

1150

Down the street here, we have Stella's Place, where a good friend of mine had her daughter, Stella, who suffered mental health illnesses, and she had to go to the States. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars and couldn't get any help there; all they did was give her more drugs. There was no services here in Ontario. She raised \$10 million of her own money with her friends and built the centre, Stella's Place, where they're helping young people by the thousands who come in to get mental health care. Can we support more service centres like Stella's Place, so they can help young people in the community rather than in the psych wards?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I appreciate the question. The member is correct that we're investing an additional, new \$140 million over the next three years in mental health and more than \$50 million annually after that on a continual basis.

Some of the things that we're doing with those funds—we're creating a brand new, province-wide, government-funded, structured psychotherapy program. We are the first province or territory in the entire country to do so. This program of structured psychotherapy will provide thousands of Ontarians with evidence-based therapies, including cognitive behavioural therapy. I think a lot of people are familiar with that. It's a proven methodology and intervention, particularly useful for those with mood disorders, including depression, for example.

We're also investing in nine new integrated youth service hubs that provide one-stop access to mental health services for people between 12 and 25, and we're investing in an additional 1,150 supportive housing units.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Premier. Many communities have been hit hard by this government's heartless attitude towards their community schools. The Liberal government thinks it's right to close productive schools that are within walking distance from many families and to send students away from their communities instead.

For example, instead of walking, the students at Burlington Central High School and Lester B. Pearson High School will be forced by this government to take a bus to a different school. As Burlington city councillor Marianne Meed Ward said this morning, these closures rip "a hole in the heart" of their communities.

Mr. Speaker, will the government call for an immediate moratorium on the closing of community schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's important that, as we have this discussion, we recognize that these decisions that boards are making—and we know how tough the decisions are—are being made in the best interests of our students.

The ministry has conducted case studies on what happens following any sort of change like a consolidation or a reorganization across the province. Here's what they found: When all parties in the consolidation or reorganization of schools were engaged in creating a new school culture, an inclusive and encouraging learning and teaching environment was the result. Here's what a student has said: "Community engagement in selecting new colours, mascots and the naming of the school encouraged the establishment of the new school identity." This is ensuring that our students feel safe, feel welcome and feel included in their new school community. That's our focus. It's on student learning and engagement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? Member from Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: Well, 600 schools are under threat. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Ann Hawkins of OECTA have spoken in favour of retaining our small schools.

Susan MacKenzie of the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures hit home, attacking the school board bait-and-switch of dumping billions into additions and consolidations, pointing out that the Auditor General recommends renewals and maintaining existing schools, which include small schools, not new infrastructure.

Will the Premier restore the value-to-community and the value-to-local-economy criteria? Premier, will you place a moratorium on school closures until you fix the formula and until the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines are fairly rewritten?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's important that we recognize that an arbitrary moratorium would not solve anything. In fact, it would take away the ability of a locally elected trustee to make those good decisions on behalf of their schools.

In addressing the concerns the member opposite raised with regard to the Auditor General and school renewal, when the Premier first appointed me to this role, that is one of the first opportunities I had, which was to add \$1.1 billion to school renewals, which met the threshold that the Auditor General has asked for.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk to staff—let's hear what they're saying: "We made every effort to hear every concern from students and parents and by the time the process was over, people felt much more positively...."

Mr. Speaker, here's a quote from a mayor: "There is no doubt there is more access to programs and resources, and more opportunities in general with a larger peer group."

"In this school I can reach ahead in math, science and woodworking." That's from a student—

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

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1500.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I understand that the member from Toronto–Danforth might have a point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask for unanimous consent to recognize the passing of a Toronto environmentalist. I'll be speaking to that in my statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let me offer some clarity of what has transpired in the past. When a member speaks of somebody as a tribute, we would do a moment of silence, but we would do it after all statements are made. So we'll wait for the member's statement. Then, after the member's statement and all of us are finished the statements, I would ask everyone to stand for a moment of silence. That would be the request of the unanimous consent.

The member has asked for unanimous consent for a moment of silence after the tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? Introduction of guests? Last call for introduction of guests?

Interjection: Are you going to introduce someone in the gallery?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, I think I will.
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just finishing my documentary, and I'll be with the members in a moment.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The dean is my surrogate for the moment.

Now that we've kind of figured out that we have a former member in the House, let me introduce, from Middlesex, in the 33rd and 34th Parliaments, Mr. Doug Reycraft.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SHAZIA AMBREEN

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to talk about Dr. Shazia Ambreen, an Alliston physician who was recently honoured here in Toronto. On February 24, Dr. Ambreen was presented with a Council Award by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons. This was a tremendous honour, and I'm pleased to say that I had the privilege of being in attendance, along with Dr. Ambreen's family members and hospital officials.

Dr. Ambreen, who grew up in Pakistan, is a valued member of the medical community in the south end of my riding. She is a physician and anesthetist at Stevenson Memorial Hospital. As well, she is chief of family medicine at the hospital and president of the Professional Staff Association.

The award that Dr. Ambreen received is presented only four times a year to doctors who have demonstrated excellence as outlined by the college.

The Alliston Herald noted, "Dr. Ambreen is recognized for her strong advocacy for patient safety and commitment to continuous improvement and excellent medical care."

I want to share with this House Dr. Ambreen's own words about working in Alliston: "Choosing to work at Stevenson Memorial was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Here I can exercise my full scope of practice as a GP anesthetist and a family physician while being surrounded by a wonderful team of supportive and engaging staff, physicians and colleagues."

Dr. Richard Simms, also at the hospital, touched on Dr. Ambreen's contributions when he said, "In my 36 years in medicine, I have seldom come across such a well-rounded physician. She is a good collaborator, works well with others, is very good at resolving conflict, maintains effective relationships, and communicates with her colleagues, nursing staff and patients with respect and dignity."

I want to thank Dr. Ambreen for her commitment to health care in south Simcoe and in my riding, and I again congratulate her on receiving this prestigious award.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I rise today to highlight the problem many families are having as they try to access the funding they're entitled to for autism treatment.

Venette Gerden receives funding to pay for treatment for her six-year-old son, James. She is required to apply for a renewal of funding 30 days in advance of when she expects her existing allocation to run out. Despite this, her application would not be looked at until she had submitted her final receipt. That happened on January 27, but it took until February 17 to sign the new contract. Then she was told she would have to wait another 30 business days—six weeks—before she would get the money. That would mean no funds for two months—two months missing to pay for vital treatment. But this isn't treatment that can just stop and start; it must be continuous.

This is not an isolated story, Speaker. It is happening to too many families. To make sure their child gets the ongoing treatment they need, families can either pay out of pocket and forgo other household bills or they can incur late payment charges with their service provider, and the ministry will not pay those late payment charges, charges that they are responsible for.

This Liberal government knows the stress that many of these families are under. It is disgraceful that the bureaucracy is only making things worse.

KAITLYN GARDINER

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is an honour to share with the House that a constituent of mine, Ms. Kaitlyn Gardiner, is this year's winner of the Speaker's Award for Youth Writers in the grades 9 and 10 category. Kaitlyn's

original short story, "A Day to Remember," explores the emotions a First Nations child from northern Ontario would experience when her mother, a Canadian Forces medical professional, departs for a distant military base, filling the child with pride and also loneliness and fear of losing her mother.

I met Kaitlyn, her parents, Laura and Paul, and her brother, Matthew, at last night's award ceremony at Queen's Park. Both Kaitlyn and Matthew live and attend school in my great riding of Mississauga-Brampton South.

It takes courage to share your gifts with strangers, but when young people do, they inspire everyone around them. Thank you, Kaitlyn, for sharing your gift, and congratulations on receiving this award.

COMMUNITY LIVING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: A recent email from the MPP for Guelph reminded me that "facts matter," so allow me to share some facts.

The MPP from Guelph claims that the executive director of Community Living has "not brought forward any issues around funding, not to the region and not to the minister."

In a recent petition, of which I have numerous, staff and family of Community Living members state, "Community Living Dufferin has a significant pay equity obligation." They're right.

I wrote to the Minister of Community and Social Services in January 2015 regarding financial pressures for pay equity. I have met and corresponded with executive directors, board and staff at Community Living many times on this issue, and the minister has been cc'd as well from Community Living Dufferin.

Finally, I met with community and social services ministry staff on behalf of Community Living Dufferin after it was suggested that they could fundraise or mortgage their building to cover their pay equity obligations. The fact is that the financial concerns for Community Living Dufferin have been raised for more than six years with me and many ministries.

The MPP from Guelph also fails to mention the impact of skyrocketing hydro rates on Community Living Dufferin's bottom line, nor was the seven-year freeze on base funding addressed. The MPP from Guelph needs to come clean and recognize the serious financial pressures Community Living Dufferin and all Community Living agencies across Ontario are experiencing instead of spreading alternative facts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right until the last moment I was fine with the statement. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw something I had indicated I wasn't going to allow. The member will withdraw.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I withdraw.

DAN McDERMOTT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to recognize the life and work of Dan McDermott, a pioneering environmentalist who died here in Toronto in early January.

1510

Dan was one of the founders of Greenpeace in this city, and not shy about doing whatever it took to advance the environmental agenda. In 1979, he parachuted onto the site of the Darlington nuclear power plant to protest proposals to build the plant. He also went in the other direction: scaling giant smokestacks on coal-fired plants to drive home the message that Ontarians needed clean air and that we had to act on climate change.

Dan was devoted, energetic, witty, optimistic, cranky when he had to be, and relentless in the work he did to protect human health and nature. His work with Greenpeace, the Sierra Club of Canada and Earthroots made a difference in this province.

Over the last few years, he did less skydiving and more lobbying to protect the greenbelt. Today we're breathing cleaner air. Today we enjoy protected green areas in the GTA. We live better lives, in part because of Dan's life devotion to the environment.

Speaker, as I've said to you, I request a moment of silence to honour Dan McDermott.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As indicated, we will finish the rest of the statements and then come back.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to speak about an event I'm having in celebration of International Women's Day in my riding of Davenport. Tomorrow, my constituency office is hosting an art gallery opening featuring works from a community organization in Davenport: Sistering: A Women's Place. As the Toronto Star noted this weekend, Sistering continues to provide vital services for women such as social support, a place to talk about women's issues, and a strong community network that helps those women who truly need it most.

We will also be recognizing five fantastic Davenport women who are recipients of the Leading Women/Leading Girls awards. Linda Correia, Margaret Smith, Manuela Sequeira, Florence Watts and Kripa Sekhar are this year's recipients of the Leading Women/Leading Girls awards in Davenport. These five women have taken leadership roles and made significant contributions in our community, and I'm proud to work beside these women who are striving every day to make Davenport and Ontario a better place.

I'm proud to represent these fantastic leading women and organizations such as Sistering in Davenport, and I hope to return to the Legislature in future to speak more about their efforts and achievements to build strong communities in Davenport. I want to take this opportunity to wish all women in Davenport and across the province of Ontario a wonderful International Women's Day.

SPEAKER'S BOOK AWARD AND YOUNG AUTHORS AWARD

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to take a moment to recognize the winners of both the Speaker's Book Award

and the Youth Authors Award. I would also like to recognize the excellent literary work of each and every author honoured with a nomination, including two from my riding.

The Speaker's Book Award is given to a resident of Ontario whose literary work highlights the diverse culture and rich history of the province and its residents. Two authors from my riding of Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington were nominated for an award at last night's ceremony.

Nominated for the Speaker's Book Award was *Seasons of Hope: Memoirs of Ontario's First Aboriginal Lieutenant Governor* by James Bartleman. Also nominated for the Speaker's youth awards book was my sons Dillon and Russell Hillier's book *One Soldier*, which recounts Dillon's time as a volunteer with the Kurdish Peshmerga and his combat experiences fighting Islamic State.

I'd also like to thank Graham Murray and the Speaker for not only taking the time to host the award ceremony yesterday evening but also for their continued promotion of the literature which tells the story of this province, its people and its shared history. Only through a commitment to literature can we ensure that we as a society have a medium of remembrance and understanding of each other's unique views and contributions to Ontario.

With that, I'd like to, on behalf of my family, send over a copy of my son's book to the Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member can have five more minutes.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry; I couldn't resist.

I thank the member. It was very kind.

KIWANIS CLUB OF TORONTO

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to recognize the centennial anniversary of the Toronto Kiwanis Club, which was chartered 100 years tomorrow, on March 8, 1917. For the past 100 years, the Toronto Kiwanis club has been focusing on supporting the advancement of young people in the city, which reflects its motto, "Serving the children of the world."

Some of the Toronto Kiwanis Club's accomplishments include the establishment of the Toronto Kiwanis Music Festival in 1944. This annual festival is recognized as one of the largest music festivals in Canada. It promotes young classical musicians and artists throughout the greater Toronto area. Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate, a high school in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, will be hosting many of the competitions in this year's festival.

The Kiwanis Club of Toronto Foundation was created in 1953. It funds programs supporting local children and youth in the city of Toronto. The foundation also awards scholarships for post-secondary education. The Toronto Kiwanis Club also funds Scarborough organizations like my riding's Kiwanis Aktion Club for adults living with

disabilities, Scarborough Arts, and Scarborough Women's Centre.

To recognize its 100th anniversary, the Toronto Kiwanis Club will be awarding 100 grants to 100 Toronto charities that work with children and youth. I commend the Toronto Kiwanis Club for this fantastic initiative and encourage all my colleagues to reach out to the communities in their ridings who may benefit from the Toronto Kiwanis Club's generous donation.

I want to congratulate the Toronto Kiwanis Club for its 100th anniversary and for serving the children of the world, particularly the children and youth in the city of Toronto.

ORT TORONTO HERO GALA

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm so pleased to rise today and speak about the ORT gala that took place last night.

I just want to mention that World ORT is the world's largest Jewish education and vocational training non-government organization. It was founded in 1880 to serve the Russian Jewish community. Now it is in 37 countries, and over 300,000 beneficiaries and students are involved each year. They build bridges in the Jewish community. We like to say "tikkun olam," which is to bring the communities together.

The celebrity roast was for Ralph Lean. He's a lawyer and a professor at Ryerson University. His passions are politics and professional sports, and you'll see that by the list of roasters: Jim Barker; Paul Beeston; Patrick Brown, leader of the official opposition; Paul Godfrey; Wayne Gretzky, by video; former Premier Michael Harris; former Premier David Peterson, by video; Glen Sather; Ken Shaw; Mayor John Tory; Masai Ujiri; Ajay Virmani; and Premier Kathleen Wynne, by video.

His wife, Marcelle, was there, as well as his kids and lots of his friends. It was a really fun evening.

I just want to say congratulations to the organizers, the volunteers, and to Ralph and his family. Kudos to Ralph for all the work he has done for the community and all the fun everybody had last night.

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

By unanimous consent of the House, we are now going to spend a moment of tribute for environmental champion Dan McDermott on his passing. Please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated March 7, 2017, from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to

standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Mr. Tabuns from the Standing Committee on Social Policy presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption.

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection / *Projet de loi 59, Loi édictant une nouvelle loi concernant les inspections immobilières et modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers et la protection du consommateur.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

1520

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENHANCING SHAREHOLDER RIGHTS ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE LES DROITS DES ACTIONNAIRES

Mr. Takhar moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act with respect to meetings of shareholders, the election of directors and the adoption of an executive compensation policy / *Projet de loi 101, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés par actions en ce qui concerne les assemblées des actionnaires, l'élection des administrateurs et l'adoption d'une politique de rétribution des hauts responsables.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: This bill makes various amendments to the Business Corporations Act with respect to meetings of shareholders, the process for electing directors and the use of proxies. In addition, this bill requires certain corporations to place before the shareholders, at every annual meeting, information respecting diversity among directors and members of

senior management. This bill also makes an amendment to provide shareholders with the opportunity to propose an executive compensation policy.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY MONTH

Hon. Jeff Leal: I rise in the House today in recognition of Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month, taking place throughout the month of March. This month-long campaign focuses on the importance of enhancing the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of agriculture with students and youth across this great province. This year's theme is, "Our food has a story."

When we understand where our food comes from and how it's produced we can think critically and make better decisions about the food we eat. Improving agri-food literacy helps us to eat healthier, supports a sustainable environment and creates jobs in every corner of Ontario. Investing in this kind of knowledge creates opportunities for the agri-food sector, whether Ontarians buy local food, choose healthy options, or decide on a career in this wonderful sector.

For the purpose of this afternoon, I'd like to take this time during Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month to discuss the opportunities that come with enhanced agricultural literacy, as well as the steps your government has taken to promote agricultural awareness in the great province of Ontario.

One way in which we're doing this is by inspiring young Ontarians to become the next generation of leaders in our province's ever-growing \$36.4-billion agri-food sector. Our agri-food sector remains one of the most diverse in the world, with 52,000 family farms producing over 200 commodities. The reality is that Ontario's agri-food sector drives the Canadian agri-food sector. And I would like to remind our audience today that by 2050, there will be nine billion people in the world to feed.

It is a sector that touches every single corner of this province and provides jobs to a diverse array of Ontarians—urban and rural, from indigenous peoples to new Canadians and to our youth. Every single day, at 5:30 a.m. in the morning, 790,000 Ontarians wake up to work in primary food production, food processing and distribution, food retail or service.

The sector's growth is being fuelled by increasing domestic and international demand, driven by both global population growth and the purchasing power and taste of a growing and expanding middle class.

In order to demonstrate our government's firm commitment to growing the sector and our promotion of agricultural awareness, I want to first inform this Legislature of the educational programs that our government and industry leaders currently have in place.

A prime example of this commitment is a partnership we have with AgScape, which recently celebrated their 25th anniversary in 2016. Since 1991, AgScape has delivered high-quality resources and programming for over a million Ontario students. Formerly known as Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc., AgScape delivers programs and resources for students and educators to increase food literacy and build awareness of career opportunities in the agri-food sector. Through agri-food education, programs, curriculum-linked materials and outreach to students and educators, AgScape helps to grow and build opportunities for our agri-food sector.

AgScape is working to strategically integrate food and farming topics, from primary production to careers in farming, in Ontario classrooms. These programs connect students and educators to agri-food sector information so that students are informed of the many opportunities that exist in the sector at a very young age. Ontario students are the next generation of agri-food specialists, policy-makers, farmers and consumers, and it's important that we showcase the wide array of careers our sector has to offer.

Ensuring students across Ontario understand the important role agriculture plays, students from all across Ontario are learning about agri-food, healthy eating and agri-food careers through AgScape programs.

I am pleased to say that since 2003, your government has provided \$400,000 annually to AgScape. That's more than \$3 million in funding. This support has helped AgScape expand their Teacher Ambassador Program, distribute student and educator resources, engage students in agri-food career activities and outreach, and inform educators about agri-food education and careers. If there are any teachers that are tuning in, I want to encourage you to visit agscape.ca, where you can find a wide range of helpful resources for the classroom.

We are proud to have been a part of AgScape's success story. We continue to be a partner of this organization and its important work.

Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague the Minister of Education, Mitzi Hunter, is doing great work across this province to get high school students excited and engaged in agriculture. Through the Specialist High Skills Major, also known as SHSM, students in grades 11 and 12 are given the opportunity to learn more about agriculture while completing their high school diploma. SHSM helps our students focused on a career path heading into apprenticeship training, college, university or the workplace, or those who are thinking of pursuing a career in agriculture, to make informed choices about the next step after secondary school.

SHSMs related to the agri-food sector include agriculture, food processing, hospitality and tourism, and horticulture and landscaping. Students can learn about a wide array of subjects such as livestock medicines, seed saving, grain grading, herbicides and pesticides, along with a range of safety initiatives such as lift truck safety and working at heights. They even have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning, which is very much

guided by the 4-H motto, "Learn by doing." Students have opportunities like visiting farms and learning to take care of and feed farm animals, or tagging along with a skilled tradesperson in the agriculture sector. These invaluable hands-on experiences are exactly what our students need to build their skills so that they become the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Mr. Speaker, our government's support for agricultural literacy is crystal clear. We are taking the steps needed to build the workforce the agri-food sector will need in the future to meet the rising demand for food right across the world.

Now, after having reviewed the wonderful work that our government is doing through educational programs to promote the agri-food sector in Ontario's schools, another way in which we are promoting agricultural literacy in the province is through the many programs and round tables that our government holds on an annual basis.

For instance, one very effective way we have promoted agricultural literacy in the province of Ontario is through our government's local food strategy, and I thank all members of the House who were involved in developing that. As part of the strategy, our government established food literacy goals in 2015 as a way to encourage the continued growth of this sector for years to come through the promotion of local foods.

The food literacy goals that were established include:

- increasing the number of Ontarians who know what local foods are available;
- increasing the number of Ontarians who know how and where to buy local foods; and
- increasing the number of Ontarians who prepare local food meals for their family and friends, and make local food more available through food service providers.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share the great progress that has been made so far. For example, 81% of shoppers can identify Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables in their grocery stores. This is due in large part to the initiatives of Foodland Ontario, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, a great legacy of the former government of Premier William Davis. Foodland's brand recognition could compete with some of the bigger players out there. Consumer recognition of the logo has remained above 90% for the last 10 years, right up there with the recognition of the logo for McDonald's. Foodland Ontario has played an important role in generating domestic demand for local foods. They do that through advertising and a branding strategy with retailers and foodservice companies. It is clear that Foodland Ontario is playing an important role in supporting our local food strategy because, Mr. Speaker, we all know in this House that good things grow in Ontario.

1530

Among the many initiatives that our government has led that promote the many opportunities that exist within Ontario's agri-food sector, I'm very proud of the series of Rural Ontario Summits that we've launched. The first of these summits was held in 2014, in the wonderful

community of Cobourg, and allowed me to reach out to rural Ontarians in different fields and from different regions of the province to gather a sense of how our province could better serve them. This past summer, we held our second summit in beautiful Stratford, Ontario, and it was an enormous success. We had more than 235 participants from more than 50 communities, bringing together a mix of urban and rural Ontarians, youth, as well as members of the indigenous communities. We focused our conversation that day on building the future, and engaged youth leaders to help look at ways to address youth retention and attraction in rural communities. I'm proud to say that we had several agriculture youth leaders present that day to share their wonderful insights.

When reflecting on these issues of youth retention and attraction that face rural communities, it is clear that providing resources and opportunities which promote agriculture literacy is vitally important to finding a solution to these challenges.

I'm also particularly proud of the many innovative agri-food businesses in this province, from butchery schools to new crop varieties.

The Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence is a great way to recognize outstanding Ontario leaders. These awards promote the great work being done in Ontario's agri-food sector.

This past year marked the 10th anniversary of the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, which was established to recognize and promote agri-food innovation across this wonderful province. The Premier's awards recognize the innovative contributions of producers, processors, agri-food organizations and rural communities in Ontario. Their innovations help to create new jobs and grow Ontario's economy by improving the existing agri-food products and practices.

In 2016, 50 regional award recipients were recognized, which includes the top Premier's Award, Minister's Award and three Leaders in Innovation award winners.

Since 2007, a total of 475 producers, processors and agri-food organizations have received the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. These award recipients are helping Ontario meet the Premier's agri-food growth challenge by supporting the province's effort to double the rate of growth in the agri-food sector and create 125,000 new jobs by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, through government initiatives such as the local food strategy, the series of Rural Ontario Summits that we have led, as well as the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, we continue to focus on building a greater awareness of Ontario's agri-food sector so that it can thrive well in the future.

Finally, while it's important to highlight the many ways in which our government has focused on agricultural literacy, I'd also like to take some time to address the various initiatives led by organizations and stakeholders that exist in the province of Ontario.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has been an active promoter of their Six by Sixteen program, ensuring that students can prepare six healthy, home-cooked meals by the time they're age 16.

In addition, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, in partnership with Chef Michael Smith, promotes the Half Your Plate campaign, encouraging Ontarians to fill half of their plate with fresh fruits and veggies.

It is with active engagement by our government, consistent investment and industry leadership that we are working towards food literacy, one Ontarian at a time.

Please join me in celebrating Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month and thanking these organizations for their hard work in improving agriculture and food literacy, not just this month but all year long. Their tireless efforts and expertise help bring topics about food and agriculture into the classroom, which in turn helps Ontario farmers and our entire economy.

Thank you to Ontario's teachers, who play a crucial role in helping inspire the students and who bring their energy, curiosity and fresh perspectives as they learn about agriculture and food.

I encourage all Ontarians to embrace Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month by doing what they can to increase their own knowledge of food and agriculture. By knowing where our food comes from and supporting those who grow, harvest and produce it, we're helping our economy, building a new generation of leaders in agriculture and creating a stronger connection between Ontarians and our vital agri-food sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is time for responses.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Today we do pay tribute in the Ontario Legislature to agriculture, not only agriculture literacy month but also agriculture literacy week. The month runs right through to the end of March.

I'd like to start with a couple of questions. Really, we wonder how many people, for example, know the difference between sweet corn and field corn. How many would know the difference between hay and straw? That question invariably comes up every single election at the Haldimand Federation of Agriculture all-candidates night. Usually one of the candidates will talk about, "I know the difference between hay and straw. Vote for me." Then, when question period comes up, there's the question: "Explain the difference between hay and straw."

Many of my colleagues here are from rural ridings. They understand many of these differences. I know the minister understands the difference. There are so many, perhaps, children of members here who may not be aware or may not really care about the difference between hay and straw. That may well go for many of their fellow students in the classroom.

We get the impression there are so many urban people, and non-farm rural people, who perhaps don't fully understand agriculture. They may not appreciate the challenges: the dependency on the weather, the debt load or worrying about juggling a combination of the futures

market and dollar exchange to try and end the year with a profit. Many people have opinions, however, on food and farming and on the way things are done in rural Ontario, and they may well be attempting to influence something they don't fully understand. One need look no further than social media for that one.

Recognizing these kinds of problems, agricultural leaders organized agriculture literacy week. Led by a non-profit group, Agriculture in the Classroom Canada, it's a week-long awareness event with a strong commitment to educating Canadian teachers and young people about the importance of agriculture contributing to a strong, sustainable, viable Canadian industry. Last year, more than 95,000 students and 3,500 classrooms across the country were visited by speakers from the industry.

When the Premier introduced the Local Food Act in 2013, we proposed an amendment to include food education as a mandatory part of the curriculum in every grade. My colleague Lisa Thompson, MPP, introduced a private member's bill that would have made it mandatory to teach about agri-food in grades 9 and 10. There are high schools that still do offer some optional courses in agriculture—not nearly to the extent of what we had previously. For several years, I taught a full-blown agriculture course at the high school level, grades 9, 10, 11, and 12, four- and five-year stream. Much of that is now gone by the way.

We have a problem. We have a problem with respect to our agri-food economy, our rural way of life, really, lacking recognition. There are jobs out there. In many cases, employers cannot find either enough trained people or enough enthusiastic workers to run their operation at 100% capacity. Again, the answer goes back to not just secondary school, but earlier. Again, I think of the success of our 4-H clubs.

When we talk about agricultural literacy, obviously we're talking about the future of farming and agri-food. There are many challenges: the price of land, for example. It has been an obstacle for a number of years. It seems to be getting worse as land prices skyrocket. You're hard-pressed to find 100 acres of farmland for less than a million dollars.

I do want to close, Speaker. Barriers like that, the price of land, prevent beginning farmers from coming in. We do emphasize the importance of ag literacy week and the importance of ag literacy month. Really it goes without saying: We really all have to strive to make ag literacy a year-round learning adventure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?
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Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to stand on behalf of my leader, Andrea Horwath, and my NDP colleagues and take a few minutes to talk about Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month, and the 52,000 family farms in this province and the over 700,000 people who actually work in agriculture. It's one of the biggest industries in this province. In the immortal words of past president of the OFA Don McCabe, "It's the biggest industry in the province because you can't eat a car."

The OFA is one of the organizations that promotes ag literacy. They have a program, Six by Sixteen, where they try to promote that Ontario's young people should be able to cook six meals by the time they're 16. I wish that program was there when I was young because I'm still just capable of doing that.

There's another great organization—it used to be called Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. It facilitated the teaching of agriculture in schools. That's more and more important as there are less and less people who have anything to do with agriculture in our younger generations. That organization has changed its name to AgScape, but it's a very important organization.

There's a simpler part of ag literacy; it's on the back of a lot of licence plates on farm trucks. It says, "If you ate today, thank a farmer." That is an important part of ag literacy.

Something that's really important is that not only do farmers in Ontario provide food, but they do the work to make sure that we have the safest food, I would say, in the world. I'll give you an example on a dairy farm: The temperature of the milk from the time it leaves the cow to the time it's on the store shelf is monitored continuously. The temperature of the water to wash the milking machines and to wash the bulk tanks is monitored continuously. Farmers have done that for years already. It's part of the Canadian Quality Milk Program. Hardly anybody knows that, and it's part of my job, in Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month, to tell people things like that.

There are a lot of great careers in agriculture. Although people think of agriculture as just farming, I have two kids who are involved in agriculture. One reads satellite data and the other one administers a program to help farmers tile-drain their land. They're not directly involved, but there are all kinds of jobs like that.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention some of the problems specifically related to rural Ontario during Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week. One of the problems is that kids in rural Ontario are losing their schools, and these are the kids who live on farms. That's an issue.

An equal issue is that a lot of people in rural Ontario, including children, don't have access to broadband Internet. It's kind of rich, when we're talking about Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month in a province as advanced as Ontario, when huge swaths of the population, specifically the people who actually produce our food, don't have access to services that we take for granted in the urban centres. That's a bit rich, to talk about how great the government is doing. Is the government doing good things? Sure they are, but they're missing the point on a lot of issues.

I have a school in my riding that has smart boards—you know, smart boards that connect to the Internet? But they have no Internet. Again, that's an example of: Do we have great things? Yes. But could we do things a lot better?

So perhaps, while we're having these rural round tables and talking amongst each other, we should look at the things that really hold people in rural Ontario back,

like access to equitable service, access to public transportation, and access to cellphone service. Huge swaths of the province where food is produced don't have access to adequate cellphone service.

Those are the things that farmers need, to keep developing our great province.

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

PETITIONS

DENTAL CARE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for petitions. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was way out in front.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have a petition here for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I want to thank Lara Mylly of the Whitewater Bromley Community Health Centre Satellite for forwarding it to me.

“Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer’s disease; and

“Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

“Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

“—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

“—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

“—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario.”

Speaker, I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it to the table with Rowan.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by people across this province.

“Support Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence.

“Whereas half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and approximately every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner; and

“Whereas a 2014 national survey showed that Canadian workers who experience domestic violence often disclose the violence to a co-worker, and that the violence frequently follows the worker to work; and

“Whereas the experience of domestic violence and sexual violence can cause significant physical, mental, emotional and financial hardship for survivors, their families, and society as a whole; and

“Whereas Canadian employers lose \$78 million annually due to domestic violence, and \$18 million due to sexual violence, because of direct and indirect impacts that include distraction, decreased productivity, and absenteeism; and

“Whereas workers who experience domestic violence or sexual violence should not have to jeopardize their employment in order to seek medical attention, access counselling, relocate, or deal with police, lawyers or the courts...;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 26 to provide employees who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence (or whose children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence) with up to 10 days of paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, and options for flexible work arrangements, and to require employers to provide mandatory workplace training about domestic violence and sexual violence.”

I fully support this petition, affix my name and will give it to page Nicholas to take.

INCLUSIVENESS

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

“Whereas there has been an increase in fear and hate towards people in our communities who practise different religions and who are from different cultures and races than the majority of the population; and

“Whereas many of our friends are feeling frightened and alone in the face of any form of discrimination and hate; and

“Whereas we want to show the world that the hate seen in Ontario does not reflect the people of our province; and

“Whereas we believe that everyone should feel welcome and safe in our communities. It is the diversity of our province that makes it so wonderful;

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

“That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario stand up and speak out against all forms of hate

and discrimination and stand together in love and kindness.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name and send it with page Sophie.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

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

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000” emergency room “visits and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

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“Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth, which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

“Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals;

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

“That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have thousands and thousands of names that come from all over northern Ontario for this petition. I’d like to thank Lionel Pellerin for signing the petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario” to “mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

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

NANJING MASSACRE

Ms. Soo Wong: I’m pleased to rise to table 3,516 signatures in support of Bill 79, from Guelph, Waterloo, Markham, Hamilton, Cambridge and Mississauga.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the events in Asian countries during World War II are not well known;

“Whereas Ontarians have not had an opportunity for a thorough discussion and examination of the World War II atrocities in Asia;

“Whereas Ontarians are unfamiliar with the World War II atrocities in Asia;

“Whereas Ontario is recognized as an inclusive society;

“Whereas Ontario is the home to one of the largest Asian populations in Canada, with over 2.6 million in 2011;

“Whereas some Ontarians have direct relationships with victims and survivors of the Nanjing Massacre, whose stories are untold;

“Whereas the Nanjing Massacre was an atrocity with over 200,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers alike were indiscriminately killed, and tens of thousands of women were sexually assaulted, in the Japanese capture of the city;

“Whereas December 13, 2017, marks the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre;

“Whereas designating December 13th in each year as the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day in Ontario will provide an opportunity for all Ontarians, especially the Asian community, to gather, remember, and honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre;

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

“That the Legislature pass the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day Act, 2016 by December 8, 2017, to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, which will enable Ontarians, especially those with Asian heritage, to plan commemorative activities to honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre.”

I support the petition and I’ll give it to page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Sorry, further questions—let’s just try this again. Further petitions?

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Community Living Dufferin has a significant pay equity obligation;

“Whereas direct support workers have experienced and continue to be threatened with reductions in hours of work and layoffs resulting in staff reductions;

“Whereas the quality and level of service to the individuals supported has been compromised;

“Whereas base funding to developmental services organizations in Ontario has been frozen for over five years;

“Whereas pay equity is a human right;

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

“(1) To direct the Ministry of Community and Social Services to provide Community Living Dufferin with one-time emergency funding to ensure services and staffing are maintained at reasonable levels; and

“(2) To renew yearly funding increases at least at the rate of inflation for all developmental services organizations in the 2017 budget.”

I affix my name to it and give it to page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further petitions?

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

Speaker, I agree. I’ll give it to Nicholaus to bring up to the table.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Joe Dickson: I’d like to present a petition to support the Ontario fair hydro plan.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to reduce energy rates, signed by literally thousands of people in Ontario.

“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 energy policies of this Liberal government ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board and the Independent Electricity System Operator, and resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province; 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

“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;

“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 affix my signature to this petition, as I totally agree with it, and I’ll give it to Mary to bring to the table.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Josh, Aaron and Jack Brownlee, from Naughton in my riding, for signing this petition, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the provincial funding formula does not recognize differences across the province, forces local school boards to compete with each other for students and does not allow capital dollars to be transferred to operating accounts where it makes sense; and

“Whereas school boards have now been forced into situations where they have to propose school closures due to inflexible policies and programs of the province; and

“Whereas under the current Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), modified accommodation reviews are allowed with inadequate community consultation and insufficient assessment of the full impacts of school closures, particularly where schools being proposed for closure will result in no school in an area; and

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“Whereas the PARG is flawed and school closures proposed under it will result in negative student outcomes and opportunities, irreversible impacts to families and communities and will undermine the mandates of municipalities and other provincial ministries;

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

“To place an immediate moratorium on all school closures across Ontario and to suspend all pupil accommodation reviews until the PARG and all funding programs have been subject to a substantial review by an all-party committee that will examine the effects of extensive school closures on the academic, social, environmental and economic fabric of students, families, communities and the province.”

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now expired.

OPPOSITION DAY

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I move that,

Whereas school closures have a devastating impact on local communities; and

Whereas children deserve to be educated in their communities and offered the best opportunity to succeed; and

Whereas rural schools often represent the heart of small towns across Ontario;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls for an immediate moratorium on rural school closures and an immediate review of the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines.

Addressed to the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Brown has moved opposition day motion number 1. Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I am proud to speak today on behalf of the Ontario PC Party's opposition day motion. This motion calls on the Liberal government to immediately issue a moratorium on school closures and launch an immediate review of the flawed Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines that determine the fate of our local schools.

School closures can have a devastating impact on communities. I see it as I travel the province. Our schools often represent the heart of small towns and big cities across Ontario, but the current review process ignores this.

In March 2015, less than a year after a majority Liberal government came to power, the government introduced the new school review guidelines. Simply put, the process is grossly unfair and undemocratic. It removes all checks and balances. For instance, the school review process was shortened to a minimum of five months and requires only two public meetings. It leaves our community representatives shut out from the process and reduces the amount of consultation to only two months. Who would have thought this would be part of their agenda leading up to the 2014 election?

Perhaps most critically, the new guidelines remove any assessment of the school's value to students, the school board, the community and the local economy. These decisions shouldn't be made by bureaucrats; they should be made by the people who live in these communities.

The reality is that the government changed the guidelines to fast-track school closures—they changed the guidelines to fast-track school closures. The reality is that after 13 years of waste and scandal after scandal, the Wynne Liberals are trying to pay for their mistakes on the backs of students, gutting our communities in the process, and it cannot continue.

I had the opportunity earlier today to meet many parents and children affected by the potential closures. Their stories are heartbreaking. This is their community. This is their school, Mr. Speaker. Communities are being divided. Students are spending a school year under the cloud of uncertainty, and this is happening all around the province. School closures mean less time with family and friends, less time for a part-time job or for extracurriculars, whether it's hockey, soccer or karate. It puts parents' lives on hold as they try to fight for their child's future, only to be ignored in the end.

As I mentioned this morning in question period, Simcoe county in my own backyard has been hit hard by this government's school closures. The village of Port McNicoll lost their school, Waubaushe lost both the Catholic and public elementary schools, and Barrie Central has already closed its doors. Nearby in Honey Harbour, trustees voted to close Our Lady of Mercy elementary school just last week. There's only one school left in the community now, Honey Harbour Public

School, but that's under review as well. If both schools are closed, these children will be facing at least a 70-minute commute each way—a 70-minute commute.

At St. John Bosco in Woodbridge, the school board is planning on converting their school to French immersion—

Interjections.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I hear the other side heckling. Closing schools is not a matter they should heckle. Mr. Speaker, I know they like to make every issue a partisan issue, but this is about children's education. This is about schools. I don't understand why they can't have an open mind. I don't understand why they can't do what they did on other issues, like they did with autism. It's okay to acknowledge when you've made a mistake. It's okay to acknowledge that maybe you've made a mistake and it's time to try a new approach. Think of all of these communities. Think of all of these students. Rather than heckle, actually try to consider what we're saying here today.

Let me give you another example, because the government loves to say that this is about schools that might not be completely full. There are schools in Barrie that were full. There are schools in Woodbridge that were at 97% capacity. This is not about empty schools; this is about saving dollars and cents.

So let me share another example for the government to appreciate. St. John Bosco in Woodbridge: The school board is planning on converting their school to French immersion. Students who want English instruction will be forced to another school. One parent who shared her story with us said that her son, who has autism, was just starting to hit his stride at St. John Bosco, which offers a specialized program for students with autism and other special needs. That's going to be gone. There are endless stories like this around the province.

Let me remind you of what happened with Chapman's Ice Cream. They offered \$1 million to keep Markdale's only elementary school open. When a business jumps in to give \$1 million because this government can't properly fund education, that's about a community remarkably standing up for their community, saying, "We want that school in our community." But it shouldn't be left on the backs of a local business—a local ice cream parlour—to fund education. That's the government's job. It's the government's job to make sure we don't rip the heart out of a community.

For me, the Markdale story and Chapman's Ice Cream is a reminder of how important schools are to a community. Who wants to move to a town if there's no school for your child to go to? You talk about declining populations in rural and northern Ontario; you take the school out and defund the hospital, what do you expect? People will leave. You're not going to set up a business in a community that doesn't have a school. They're creating a negative cycle. They're giving up on rural Ontario, and it's not right.

The fact that the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures sent Premier Wynne and the education minister

a letter on behalf of—hear this—900,000 concerned Ontarians shows how just how far-reaching and damaging this process has been.

The Ontario PC Party is united in our opposition to these short-sighted closures. It's clear that the current review is not working. The review process must ensure that community needs are genuinely taken into consideration before any more schools shut their doors. We need to put a stop to it and we have an opportunity to do that today. That's why this government should do the right thing and support our motion.

Frankly, this government also needs to stop shrugging off the mistakes on someone else. They're very good at pointing the finger, saying it's a government from 20 years ago or it's the school boards or it's the trustees. They've set policy to avoid political accountability, and today is an opportunity to do the right thing—not point the finger; not blame others; take ownership and support our schools. Education is a provincial policy. It is their choice to fund these schools, to keep schools in rural Ontario or to continue playing these games.

I saw the government on the autism file. We brought this up again and again and again—the great work of the member for Dufferin—Caledon, in particular. We kept on raising this. Despite the government saying every single day that no funding was needed, eventually, after two months, they reversed course and said, "Okay, we are going to offer that funding." I was first to rise and say, "Thank you for doing the right thing. Thank you for funding the therapy for those children."

I'm hoping that we can see this issue of school closures bring that positive side to the government too. I hope that this is a genuine opportunity to reflect on what has happened. We've seen close to 600 schools closed on the watch of this government since 2003—600 schools. This is an opportunity to say, "That's too much. Our towns, our communities can't take this." This is an opportunity to say today, "We're not going to give up on rural Ontario. We're going to support our students and we're going to have quality education. Whether it is in Owen Sound or Toronto or Timmins, we're going to have the same quality education."

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This is the right thing to do. I implore the government to do the right thing and support our motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure for me to rise today as the Ontario NDP education critic to participate in this very, very important debate on calling for a moratorium on rural school closures in Ontario.

I want to begin by congratulating organizations like the Community Schools Alliance, which has been highlighting this issue for more than a decade, since I was on the Thames Valley District School Board. The Ontario Alliance Against School Closures, which is here today, has done some fantastic work in terms of analyzing the funding formula and understanding the impact of how the Liberals are funding education, the impact that

that is having on rural schools and community schools across this province.

I want to thank the parent organizations everywhere that are forming to try to have a voice in decisions that school boards are making about potential school closures in their communities because parents, more than anyone, understand the kind of impact a school closure will have on their children and on their community.

I also want to recognize the chambers of commerce, economic development organizations and businesses, like Chapman's Ice Cream in Markdale, that recognize the vital contributions of local schools to a vibrant, thriving local economy. In particular, I participated in the pre-budget consultations in London. The Kitchener-Waterloo chamber of commerce came and spoke to the committee about this very issue, about the importance of maintaining local schools in order to ensure a thriving local economy.

In this House, I recently had an opportunity to rise and talk about Bill 92, another critical piece of education legislation, which was about the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. I shared with MPPs in this chamber my own experience in public education as a parent in 1997 when the Mike Harris Progressive Conservatives famously created a crisis in public education in this province that galvanized parents across Ontario to take action, stand up and protest what the Conservatives were doing to public education. It actually prompted me to put my name forward in 2000 to run for the school board.

I note that 2000 was the same year that the leader of the official opposition was elected. It was the same election. He was elected to council; I was elected to the school board. So he was there as well as I, although in a different capacity, and he saw the impact of the changes that Mike Harris had made to public education in this province.

I'm sure that he remembers the wave of school closures that swept this province as a result of the PC funding formula changes. I'm sure that he remembers seeing school boards struggling to deal with the impact of these deep funding cuts that had been introduced. He may remember the election of 2003, which was fought on this very issue, as Ontarians across this province rose up and said that they wanted to see an end to school closures. That resulted, under the Liberal government a couple of years later, in a moratorium.

It's very interesting that the leader of the official opposition is today bringing forward a motion calling for a moratorium to address school closures. As my colleague said, this is Groundhog Day. This is a movie that we have seen before.

On behalf of New Democrats, I want to say that we certainly support the spirit of this motion. We were concerned about school closures in 2003, and we remain very concerned about school closures in 2017. However, at the same time, we also have some concerns with the wording that has been proposed and brought to us today.

First, the motion talks about a moratorium on school closures and a review of the Pupil Accommodation

Review Guideline. It does not link the moratorium to the review. It just says that both of these processes need to take place, but it doesn't say that as a result of the review of the guideline there could be a rational discussion about how to deal with pupil places in this province.

The motion applies only to rural schools. I know, as a trustee in the Thames Valley District School Board and as a representative of the city of London, that school closures have as devastating an impact on urban communities as rural communities. So, certainly, one of the things that we would like to see is an expansion of this motion to urban communities as well.

Finally—and I suspect that this was deliberate—the motion is silent on the need for a review of the funding formula—the very funding formula that was introduced by Mike Harris way back in 1997, that has been tinkered with around the edges over and over again by the Liberals but remains the root of the problem. This is something that analysts who have been watching this for years understand.

I want to commend the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on an excellent report that was released in February 2015 called *Harris-era Hangovers: Toronto School Trustees' Inherited Funding Shortfall*. This report, written by a very respected economist, points out that the problems with the Toronto District School Board in 2015 result from two key issues. The first—and this is right from the report—is, “The deeply flawed school funding formula for elementary and secondary education, designed by Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government and inherited by the Liberal government when it was elected in 2003, has never been fixed. The longer the funding formula remains neglected, the more school boards are forced to work around the problem by diverting funds from dwindling grants meant to support additional services for high-need students,” and also to ensure that there is adequate funding for public education.

Speaker, I think I'm reaching the end of my time today. I know that many of my other colleagues would like to participate in this debate. But I did want to quickly highlight an excellent letter that all MPPs, I believe, received today from parents in Burlington. It is called “School Closures About Dollars, Not Sense.” It identifies what the letter calls the dirty dozen of problems that have contributed to the current situation, where we see 600 schools in Ontario are presently caught up in a pupil accommodation review process.

The first of those dirty dozen problems is the fact that the province has decided to eliminate top-up funding, which penalizes school boards that maintain geographically diverse schools.

I'm just going to reference a couple of other issues that were identified in the letter, because I think they're important.

Problem number 8 is that the pupil accommodation review processes and decisions “violate a range of provincial policies.” In particular, it talks about the preservation of Ontario's heritage resources, and I know that maintaining the built heritage in this province is critically

important to organizations like the Ontario heritage council. The Ontario heritage council has expressed deep concern about the fact that there is a \$15-billion backlog in maintenance and infrastructure needs across the education stock in this province that, because of neglect, is leading to these very important heritage buildings to potentially be closed.

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I have a letter here from the Ontario heritage council that talks about the fact that the Toronto District School Board has a \$3.5-billion backlog in infrastructure renewal—expected to grow to \$5.6 billion by 2020—which is going to lead to many prematurely derelict buildings and unnecessary replacements. This letter refers to a current debate that’s going on in the city of Toronto over a heritage designation for Davisville Public School, but it identifies that debate as “the tip of a very big iceberg of demolition by neglect.” That is a loss for this province and for communities everywhere.

Another issue that’s identified in the letter from the Burlington parents is around the need for increased busing. This is an issue that has been flagged by the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures. When you close schools and you put kids on buses to go to the other schools that are left open—in some cases, in some of our northern and rural communities we have kids on buses almost longer than they’re at school, which is completely unacceptable and contradictory to the Liberal government’s carbon reduction plan.

The root of the problem is a funding formula from the Harris PCs that has been completely not addressed, not fixed, by the Liberals, and that is effectively incentivizing school boards to close schools in order to access capital dollars to build where schools are needed.

This motion today talks about the review of the program accommodation guideline; that’s important. It calls for a moratorium on rural school closures; that’s important. But we also critically need that review of the funding formula to ensure that the resources are there so that school boards can make rational decisions and not decisions that are driven entirely by dollars.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I am proud to rise today to speak to this motion, to talk about our schools and to talk about the education system that we have in Ontario. I’m so proud to talk about Ontario’s publicly funded education system, regarded as one of the best systems in the entire world. The investments that we’ve made in improving Ontario’s education system have resulted in greater student achievement and well-being. As the member prior has said, that’s building on a foundation that was quite shaky that was left from the previous government.

Since 2003, more than 14,000 people from 1,100 international delegations have come to this province to review the work happening in the Ministry of Education, in our school boards and in our schools across this province. Considering we inherited a severely under-

funded and neglected system, our government has been making significant investments to improve and make gains in our education system that will have a lasting impact for generations to come.

Today, I stand in the House to speak to our continued commitment to Ontario’s publicly funded education system. In particular, I would like to stress our government’s commitment to finding solutions to meet both local needs and the educational needs of Ontario’s students.

As I was listening to the Leader of the Opposition talk about what he sees in our schools, I was very disappointed. I visit our schools. I try to get to our schools each and every week. When I go to our schools, I see students of all ages, of all backgrounds, who are so passionate about education and about learning. Whether it’s teachers, EAs, ECEs, the secretary in the office, the vice-principal, the principal or the custodian, I see a whole school community that is focused on student learning, on student well-being and on student achievement.

It’s incredible: No matter where you go in this province—into northern communities, across eastern Ontario, across rural communities, in urban places—you see that passion for education and that passion for learning. Our job is to ensure that we support—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I’m going to ask that the dialogue or communication—call it whatever you like—between two members, one from the third party and the other from the government side, stop so that I can hear what the Minister of Education has to say. Thank you very much.

Back to the minister.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker.

Over the past few months, I’ve been travelling across the province to visit schools, and I have listened to the concerns about recent accommodation reviews. I know we can all agree that school closures and school consolidations are amongst the most difficult decisions that a school board has to make, particularly in rural and remote communities.

We entrust publicly funded school boards with the responsibility to decide on the best schools to support well-being and student achievement. They also have a responsibility to ensure that the publicly funded school system is financially sustainable and can continue to support students for years to come. School boards have had this important and difficult responsibility under governments of all political stripes. We know these decisions are best made locally, in the local community, not here at Queen’s Park. Fulfilling these responsibilities requires dedication, creativity and sometimes hard choices by our school boards. However, these choices do not always result in school closures. In fact, our government has provided many new paths and supports for school trustees to support local decision-making and partnership-making.

First, we have made it clear that the province expects the four school board systems to work together and, with

their communities and municipalities, to find solutions and opportunities for co-location. This is critical, that they work together.

This means that prior to commencing student accommodation changes, it is our government's strong preference that school boards fully explore sharing school facilities with each other, particularly if doing so will maintain a school presence in a rural or isolated community. It's imperative that these boards work together.

To that end, the Ministry of Education has committed dedicated funding to assist school boards in pursuing joint-use school opportunities. This funding is being allocated to support school boards for the development of joint-use school proposals. Let me be clear: We welcome all of those creative proposals and creative opportunities that are identified in communities. The ministry will highlight joint-use experiences and develop a joint-use-of-schools tool kit to assist boards and communities.

Since becoming Minister of Education, I have heard and seen, through many visits to school boards across the province, a number of examples where school boards have collaborated on joint local planning. Take, for example, the new state-of-the-art school that will open in 2018 in Hamilton to accommodate 800 secondary students. This facility will be jointly operated and occupied by the French public and French Catholic school boards that serve the Hamilton area.

Mr. Speaker, when we made this announcement, what was really terrific was seeing the excitement and, really, the anticipation on the faces of those students from both boards as they could imagine how great their new school was going to be. This is a high school that will be designed for the students of both of those boards.

We have also provided funding to support a joint school in Whitney, Ontario, where students from the English public and English Catholic systems will share a facility.

These collaborations are good examples of how school boards have been able to collaborate to ensure that students receive modern school facilities and enhanced programming. We need more of this type of collaboration across school boards in Ontario.

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On my visits to schools, I've been able to see first-hand how enthusiastic the students, staff and administration are with the wealth of opportunities that they are being offered in their new school space, whether it's through their joint use between boards or K-to-12 arrangements to maintain a school presence in rural communities. These ideas are ensuring that our schools are thriving places for all students.

Through case studies on the experiences of school reorganizations across the province, we're seeing how these initiatives are working. These studies found that due to larger student cohorts and consolidated staff, program offerings and co-curriculars were generally enhanced. When all parties were engaged in creating a new school culture, a more inclusive and encouraging learning and teaching environment was built. Students

were involved in building the character and identity of their new joint-use facility. The study also found that the initial fears of the individuals impacted were alleviated and students adapted quickly to their new environments.

At the end of the day, that is what it is all about: It is about student achievement and student well-being. What do we need to do to support our students so that they are learning in the best possible environment? School staff told us that "people felt much more positively because they didn't realize how much more they would be getting in the new school."

We want students to thrive. Some of the most important benefits offered came with improved academic programming. Not only did the study demonstrate that students had more access to better programming with regard to math and science; they received more experiential learning opportunities, including woodworking and shop classes.

With all of that in mind, I cannot stress this enough: This process should be all about working together to provide better learning opportunities for students by offering more courses, specialty programs, extracurricular opportunities and improved facilities.

This opposition motion neglects to acknowledge that under the PCs there was no guideline in place whatsoever. It was chaos in education.

Changes have occurred since we introduced the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline and the updates to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline in 2015 to ensure that communities have the opportunity to provide meaningful input when discussing school accommodation changes. The updated guidelines provide boards with better tools to address local circumstances and are meant to enable partners to work together to find unique solutions to meet the needs of their communities by sharing spaces.

Under the new consultation process, all 72 school boards must undertake long-term capital and accommodation planning, and inform this planning with the input of municipal governments and community partners. It lays an expectation to do this prior to implementing an accommodation review. Boards must include relevant information obtained from municipalities and communities and report back to trustees before they make a final decision. Boards must also provide delegations with an opportunity to respond to the final recommendations presented to the board of trustees. It now requires school boards to consult with municipal governments and other community partners before and during the review process—and, I would also say, even after the review process, because we have put forward an annual meeting of boards and municipalities. The review process includes consultations with coterminous school boards, upper- and lower-tier municipalities, public health boards, local health integration networks, lead children's mental health centres, universities or colleges in the area and indigenous groups.

Having visited a number of communities across Ontario, it is apparent that community consultation is

absolutely essential when it comes to school board planning. That includes speaking with parents and with students about the future of their school. We must hear from all parts of the community when making this important and critical decision. That is why, going forward, our government will be considering how community impact measures could be best included in the pupil accommodation review process. This will involve working with municipalities and school boards to explore how we can make sure that the needs of students and the impact of accommodation changes on the community are best taken into account.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to address the motion brought forward by the member of the opposition for a moratorium on schools. As Minister of Education, I am responsible for ensuring that all students get the best possible supports so that they can succeed. An arbitrary moratorium would limit the number of opportunities available to students, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. We do not want to hold school boards back from making decisions based on their local needs.

I'll give you an example. A recent change in Peterborough is a terrific example of what I'm talking about. In October, I was in Peterborough with Minister Leal. Together, we announced \$13 million in provincial funding to open a new elementary school in East City. This will replace King George Public School and Armour Heights Public School in the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. A review was done and the decision was made that the two outdated schools would be merged into one new school on the King George site. You will recall, Minister Leal, that the entire community came out to support this announcement, having been a part of the decision during the consultations.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Absolutely. City councillors were there, the mayor was there—everybody.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Absolutely. The new school will have a capacity of over 640 students, and it will create a new, modern learning space. You should have seen the excitement on the faces of all of the students in anticipation of their new school. Those who had gone to the school prior were also very excited.

Similarly, in January, I had the opportunity to meet with the town of Meaford, who are very excited about the \$24-million provincial investment in a new K-to-12 consolidated school that will provide improved programming for students.

By creating a blanket policy, we would shorthand the process and the progress made by these local communities to provide students with better programming and modern facilities that are in the best interests of their local students in their local communities.

We continue to encourage municipalities, communities and school boards to work together to find the best possible solutions based on the needs of the regions. I would encourage the members opposite to get involved. Connect with your school boards. Connect your boards and your municipalities so that they can make the best decisions possible in the interests of students in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, another example is in Sault Ste. Marie. I visited St. Mary's College in Sault Ste. Marie, where three schools amalgamated in a brand new state-of-the-art facility that opened in September 2015. I had a chance to visit this school and to see just how strong the sense of school pride is in that facility. From crafting their own tables in the construction class to building their own businesses from the ground up as part of the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program, the new facilities and the joint resources allowed students to use new resources to carry out and to build on their passions and their talent. In fact, that high school is even working with the middle school to prepare those learners to transition into the high school later on. It was wonderful to see, and this fantastic new facility that was purpose-built for the use of that school community will serve the needs for many, many years to come.

I've heard from the local community that having made this very difficult decision to consolidate this high school into this new school—it was a tough conversation that they had. But now, having come through that and seeing how this school is benefiting their community and benefiting the students who are receiving an excellent, quality education, they see that this was the best thing to do, and it's going to last for many years into the future.

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Although talks of consolidation and accommodation reviews are never easy—and I recognize that and I acknowledge the fact that these are very difficult discussions—we expect school boards to work with the community to ensure that future solutions prioritize student achievement and student well-being. I have seen first-hand how school boards have been working to think outside of the box and find new solutions that put students first.

Take our government's investment in community hubs. Let's talk about that. This allows school boards to collaborate with municipalities and community organizations to think about how surplus property could be used in new ways to serve communities and families.

Let's take the example of Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. Greenville public school, a partnership between school, the city and the community to include a space with a public library, a community centre and a school all under one roof in one space—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Great idea.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: What a terrific idea of the community connecting with the school in that particular site.

How about Parry Sound, where the former William Beatty Public School is being developed into Parry Sound Community Hub, a hub which will feature affordable housing, an early years centre and much, much more?

We have recognized that these are public facilities and we must find creative ways of involving the community in making these good decisions. In May 2016, we announced \$90 million to support community hubs in schools: \$20 million for new child care spaces and child

and family support programs in schools—these are fantastic programs—that are meeting the needs of our local communities; \$18 million to retrofit existing surplus space in schools for use as child care space; as well as \$50 million to renovate existing surplus school space to accommodate the use by a community partner.

We also updated provincial regulations and guidelines to require school boards to notify more community partners about the opportunity to use excess space within schools. Through a community hub division of the Ministry of Infrastructure, our government will continue to consider how we can use public property in a manner that takes into account the best interests of local communities. Just yesterday, myself and Minister Chiarelli, we wrote to all of the municipalities and to the school boards to inform them of these opportunities.

In my role as Minister of Education, I am responsible for ensuring that every student has access to the best possible education so that they can reach and achieve their full potential. We are continuing to see student achievement across our province rise. Our students in rural areas are an integral part of that.

I want to take this time to speak about our commitment to rural schools. When I look at this motion that is put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, it's disappointing. When you talk about the "devastating impact on local communities," have you considered the rise in our graduation rates and the fact that more young people are achieving graduation than ever before in the history of this province? These investments are supporting our young people to achieve their full potential. It's important that we not disregard that, because our young people have to be prepared to take on the challenges that they will face in the 21st century. In order for them to do that, having the best education possible will equip them.

I want to take this time to speak about our commitments specifically to rural schools, because that's what we're here to debate. Our government has made significant investments in the rural education system, and we continue to prioritize rural Ontario education. Since 2003, we have invested over \$1.1 billion in nearly 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario, and since 2013, we have increased annual funding for rural boards specifically by \$200 million. Student enrolment in rural boards in 2016-17 is funded at an average of about \$12,500 per pupil, about \$1,000 more than their peers in urban boards. In 2016-17, we will provide approximately \$3.7 billion in funding towards rural school boards. Since 2003, we have invested over \$1.1 billion in nearly 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario.

We are proud of these fiscal commitments and have responded to the unique challenges that rural schools face by updating our funding formula so that rural school boards benefit from:

- increased funding to support the higher cost of purchasing goods and services for small and rural school boards;

- additional supports for the heating, lighting and maintenance costs of excess space in schools that are a

considerable distance from other schools so we can make sure we protect those schools that are very remote;

- new supports for special education funding;

- funding for additional principals in schools that combine elementary and secondary students, depending on the enrolment levels, in the same space;

- funding to support a minimum number of teachers and early childhood educators for remote schools with small enrolments;

- secure access to provincial virtual learning environments and e-learning courses, supporting equitable and timely access to credit courses that otherwise might not be available close to a student's home; and

- investments in a multi-year program to improve access to broadband connectivity to ensure that rural schools have that access.

I think we can all agree that school closures and school consolidations are sensitive matters. While boards are moving forward, working with the communities and having these difficult conversations to find the best path forward to provide the best programming options for students, in some cases I have also heard of the difficulties where communities have not felt adequately engaged in their pupil accommodation reviews. That is why, starting this spring, our government will launch an engagement of new approaches to better support education in rural and remote communities. I want to say thank you to the parliamentary assistants, MPPs Granville Anderson, Grant Crack and Lou Rinaldi, who will be going out to gather feedback on how our province can further strengthen the future of rural education in Ontario. It is our hope that this engagement will allow us to highlight opportunities that will proactively enhance the quality and delivery of education in rural and remote communities in Ontario.

We know Ontario is changing. Some parts of Ontario face demographic challenges, while others are seeing considerable growth. In this change, it is important that every Ontario student, whether urban or rural, has access to high-quality education. A high-quality education means finding new and creative ways to invest in students in our rural communities. This will not happen if we put a stop to the local leadership collaboration we know is yielding good results. It will only happen if we focus on the needs of students and communities.

We are committed to working to ensure that we have complete communities, whether they are urban, rural, northern or remote. I stand by our government's expectation that school boards and communities work together to facilitate positive, collaborative and inclusive relationships with each other. While these conversations are never easy, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that our local leaders' and our provincial commitment to engage more broadly across the province this spring will result in a process that continues to invest in our most cherished assets: our students.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

1650

Mr. Steve Clark: Our motion calling for a moratorium on school closures is being watched very closely in

my riding of Leeds–Grenville. Last Thursday, I was in Kemptonville to stand up for the seven elementary schools in my riding that the Upper Canada District School Board has recommended for closure. Speaker, that's one in every four of the board's elementary schools in my riding.

It was the second of two nights where the board heard delegations from parents, community and business leaders, mayors and council members. I was so impressed by the outstanding quality of these presentations and the overwhelming support for these schools.

Parents, students, local councils, business leaders and citizens have worked very hard on plans to keep open those doors at our rural schools. As I said this morning in question period, they've shown what's possible when we view our rural schools as the unique and valuable assets that they are. I want to thank the parents who have sent me emails, called me and sent me letters. I was just reading one from Erin Merkley, a parent from Benson Public School. Thank you, Erin, for your wonderful comments.

The process is backwards. The pupil accommodation review process starts with a closure recommendation and forces the community to come up with a solution. The timelines are incredibly tight, and as we're seeing, the odds are stacked against schools once they're targeted. That's why, since last fall, I've been calling for a moratorium on school closures, something—you know, moratoriums aren't new for this government. They've done it on a variety of issues in the past.

I want to take that threat of closure off the table and bring everyone together. The process I have been talking about would take MPPs from all parties, the minister, all four boards and our communities. We need to develop a province-wide rural education strategy, one that includes fixing the broken funding model for small schools. And it can be successful, because I've seen it work in this process. I've seen communities come together to give us ideas to save our schools.

I know that the Minister of Education, who just spoke, released a letter in response to our motion last night. She highlighted all the things that she felt her government claims to be doing to support rural schools, but the reality is, those measures aren't working, because boards across the province are proceeding at full speed with school closures. Upper Canada trustees decide the fate of a dozen schools in just over two weeks, and the board chair confirmed to media today that the letter from the minister doesn't change anything. In two weeks, they're having their meeting and they're going to vote, potentially, to close 12 schools in Leeds–Grenville.

So the minister's plan to have three parliamentary assistants engage with communities this spring isn't much help to the communities that have already lost their schools. To use that old rural saying, Speaker, this is like closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. That's what this minister is doing with this letter last night. Unless the government supports our call for a moratorium, it's just an empty gesture, motivated to give government MPPs talking points today in the House.

Platitudes won't preserve these places to learn for a new generation of rural students. If the minister is serious about valuing rural schools, she will support our motion and implement a moratorium before the lights go out on another school. She has to act by supporting our motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to the PC opposition day motion regarding a moratorium on rural school closures and a review of the accommodation review guidelines, or, as it's referred to now, PARGs.

I will specifically address this motion and some concerns that I have with it. I'm supportive of the idea—absolutely. In fact, November 21 of last year, I held a press conference and had people from across the province in rural communities join me, not only for the press conference to talk about the issue regarding rural school closures and what that means for those communities, but we also had a rally out on the front lawn of Queen's Park. I want to recognize those who came to Queen's Park back in November.

That's not the first time I've raised the issue. It's certainly not the first time our party has raised the issue. That really was the first time that the PCs decided they wanted to get on board because they realize, by the number of people coming to Queen's Park, that maybe it was a good issue for them to jump on—probably for votes, but I'm glad that they finally joined the party. That's a bad choice of words. I'm not sure we'd want them in our party, but anyway.

I'd like to thank Susan MacKenzie of the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures, and Judy Keeling, who joined me on the panel for our press conference, and the many people from across the province who came for the rally. I would also like to thank Krista Wylie from Fix Our Schools, who has been a tireless advocate for proper funding of our education system, specifically around the condition of the buildings and the fact that there is a \$15-billion capital repair backlog. I know the government announced some money; it's not even going to address the repair backlog, let alone the condition of the schools going forward. I think that might have been an important piece to acknowledge in the motion as well.

Part of the reason that school boards are faced with closing schools is based purely on the condition of those buildings, because this government does not give school boards enough money to manage the upkeep of these buildings. So while the minister stood up in her time and talked about these wonderful new school buildings that they are putting up, these modern facilities and how excited these children are to be in them, the fact of the matter is that a lot of those kids and families are excited to have new school buildings because the schools they were in are crumbling. They don't have the technology that they need. They don't have warm classrooms in the winter. They don't have cool classrooms in the summer. They don't have ceilings that are not leaking when it rains. The buildings are in such terrible condition.

I'm not making this up. I was a school board trustee for eight years. I can tell you that the way this government underfunds the system is deplorable. They want to talk about how they support students. They want to talk about how they—

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I've got a member from the other side saying I'm making it up. Perhaps you should actually talk to school board trustees. We have actually had several school boards come forward and say how much they are underfunded, not only for programming and services for students but for the care and the upkeep of their buildings. Anyway, Speaker, I'm not going to engage in that conversation with someone who clearly has not been speaking to Ontarians or to school board trustees.

The minister also talked about how she wants to put the fact that these schools are closing solely in the lap of trustees, which is unfair and unreasonable. As a former trustee for eight years, I can tell you that trustees are elected by the people in their municipalities to make decisions based on what is best for their communities. They are not elected by the people in their communities to do the dirty work of the Liberal government, which is exactly what is happening, based on the current funding formula. That is exactly what is happening. This government is tying the hands of those elected officials whom they claim to respect, those elected officials who they say they empower to make these decisions. In fact, they are tying their hands.

They talk about the process around school closures and how, again, it's up to trustees to make these decisions, to go through the process; it's up to the trustees to consider the input of the communities, to listen to the businesses and to the people who live in those communities before making the decision to close schools. Again, it's a flawed process. If there was proper funding in place, then the majority of the time—not all the time, because again, sometimes there are buildings that are in such disrepair because of lack of funding that trustees have to make the difficult decision to close those schools, but the majority of the time—the decision is based solely on the fact that the government is starving them of funding to keep those schools open.

If the trustees actually had proper funding, they would choose to keep those small community schools open. In this case, they would make the decision is to keep those rural schools open because trustees realize that closing rural schools, ripping the heart out of a community and putting kids on buses for hours a day—some for two or three hours a day—is not what's best for students. How can you expect a child to be on a bus for that long and then go into a school and be able to learn? Its unreasonable and it's unfair.

Speaker, the minister talked about how much they are supporting rural schools, when in fact they cut \$10 million from the geographic circumstance grant over two years. That was a fund specifically to support rural schools. I noticed that the minister didn't talk about the

\$10-million cut that they've made specifically to rural schools.

1700

It's interesting, because before the Premier became the Premier, she actually fought school closures. I'm not sure how that's changed. The Premier mentioned this morning that when they came into power 13 years ago, they supported moratoriums. Why do they not support them now? Why have they, in 2015, changed the school closure process in order to shorten it—to actually, in some cases, completely cut out community input; cut out the voices of those municipal leaders and those partners who may come and want to help and be part of the community hub; and more importantly, cut out the voices of the parents and the students who would access their education in these buildings?

It's interesting, because the minister made a statement that basically said that larger classes and fewer education workers and fewer teachers is working better for students, which is absurd to me. I don't know how she could make an argument like that, other than trying to cover for the fact that they're underfunding the system and school boards are actually being forced to eliminate education workers and increase class sizes. I know that education workers constantly advocate for smaller class sizes.

Specifically to the motion before us: Again, I have issues with it. I'm supportive, in principle, but it doesn't actually address funding. You can't call for a moratorium and say, "Stop school closures," without saying, "Give these school boards the resources that they need to keep these schools open." I think that was quite a large oversight on the part of the PC Party and their leader, Patrick Brown.

It also doesn't talk about an end date: When would the moratorium end? Because we do need to empower trustees. We need to give them the tools that they need to do what it is they're elected to do. We need for them to be able to make a decision. So we need to know when, if we're going to impose a moratorium on school closures—and I hope somebody from the PC Party, when they have their remarks, will be able to clarify that. When exactly will that moratorium end? What kind of flexibility will trustees be given in order to decide when it actually is best to consolidate schools? I'd like to say "consolidate," but frankly, when you consolidate, you're closing schools. You're taking at least two schools and putting them into one.

It's interesting to me that the Conservative Party would bring forward an education motion without speaking specifically about—they want to talk about supporting rural communities, and that certainly is important. I, having been a trustee for city schools, have had conversations with my colleagues who represent rural schools. We recognize the importance of rural communities, but the schools in their communities—it's a very different situation than in an urban community. But you cannot talk about supporting children and supporting schools without talking about supporting the education workers.

What we've seen from both sides of the House, both the Liberals and the PCs, is that they don't support education workers, whether it was through Bill 103 or Bill 115 stripping teachers of their right to strike and imposing contracts on them. We have seen that they don't truly support the education workers in our system. I would suggest that that's a very important piece—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Come on. Come on.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The Premier is looking at me and saying, "Come on," but your voting record is your voting record, and the bills you bring forward are the bills you bring forward.

It's a very important piece to recognize and acknowledge our education workers and support them as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a delight to have the opportunity to get in a few words today. I look at education through the eyes of my lovely wife, Karan. Just last week, she was recognized as one of the top 40 principals in Canada.

We often chat about education. She has been in this business quite a while, as a teacher, a vice-principal and now a principal. She would reflect about all the series of governments that she went through. She remembers when she had to give those unpaid days back in the early 1990s. She was—

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, just hold it here, folks. I'm getting to your time.

When she was pregnant with our second child, Shanae, in 1999, she was on the picket line because she was locked out by the government of the day. Then, of course, fast-forward to the time of stability in the classroom and investment during the last 13 years.

But I really want to chat about a moratorium for a moment. In my last term on Peterborough city council, between 2000 and 2003, I represented the south end part of Peterborough, Otonabee ward. During that period of time, Kawartha Pine Ridge, which was the public school board, closed three schools in the south end area: King Edward, Confederation school, Grove school. The Catholic board actually closed my elementary school, St. John the Baptist. If the moratorium had been put in place then, we wouldn't have resolved an education situation for the people in the south end.

What we did was, we brought forward the mayor, Mayor Sylvia Sutherland. We brought forward my council mate, Councillor Glenn Pagett, and myself. We met with the trustees, and we worked with the provincial member of the day, who was a member of the government, Mr. Gary Stewart. We sat down together to come up with a solution for kids in the south end of Peterborough. What we did, Mr. Speaker: The public board built a brand new school called Roger Neilson school—because he established his reputation as a hockey coach coaching the Peterborough Petes. What we did with my old school was, we acquired the former Confederation site on Park Street.

But what was the real message here, Mr. Speaker? The boards, the trustees, the municipal leaders—everybody worked together to come up with a solution for the south end of Peterborough. If a moratorium had been put in place between 2000 and 2003, we would have never got that kind of solution. That's the kind of solution we need today to solve the problem with rural schools.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: The parents here today and listening at home did not come here to hear this Premier and government say they have absolutely no input into what's happening with respect to school closures around the province, or, in the words of the current education minister, to hear, "You won't find solutions at Queen's Park." You see, the parents remember the time the Premier was telling Ontarians that she got into politics because of education. They remember her promising that she was running because she wanted to be a force of good in people's lives. They want the Premier and her education minister to stand on those principles now and open their eyes to solutions. And here's why: Parents care about their kids and their education needs.

As of today, the Liberal government's education policies are driving the potential closure of as many as 600 elementary and secondary schools across Toronto. This is what happens when you build a staggering \$11-billion deficit. Scandal, mismanagement, waste and habitual overspending are now forcing decisions that the kids are actually going to pay for.

In my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, they've ordered 18 schools for potential closure across the Blue-water school board, including Paisley Central School, Beavercrest Community School in Markdale, and Chesley high school.

Mr. Speaker, employers looking to expand business and add jobs, such as Chapman's Ice Cream in Markdale and Bruce Power in Tiverton, deserve to have assurance that they have key amenities, such as schools staying open, to provide the workers of tomorrow.

Here's what Ashley Chapman, vice-president of Chapman's Ice Cream, asked me to share with you and all members of this House:

"Recently Kathleen Wynne made a statement that if a rural community provided concrete solutions to school boards, there was a chance they could keep their school open. No one has offered more of a concrete solution to the school board's problems than Chapman's Ice Cream. We have offered millions of dollars in donations to keep our school open, and it seems like it isn't good enough. We have been accused of trying to start a two-tier education system in this province, but that is completely untrue. We already have a two-tier system: rural schools and urban schools. The most important resource in this country is our children, and I dare anyone of any political affiliation to disagree with this. The province is sending a clear message that the education, and the very future of our youth in rural Ontario, is not a priority for this government. This is a disastrous message to send to our

children in this critical time of their development. The solution is simple: All we ask is that the Premier makes the only moral choice to support our rural communities, not destroy them.”

Mr. Speaker, I stand with Chapman's. Our most important resource is our children.

It's very interesting to know that this government always suggests that they are the education party, and yet they're going to close 600 schools and decimate communities along the way.

It's never too late, Premier and Minister of Education, to do the right thing. I ask you today: Support this motion. Place a moratorium on further school closures. Review and revise the funding formula. Don't make another mistake that Ontarians will pay for. Our kids' future is at stake.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

I'd like to inform the House that we have very special guests with us this afternoon. I'd like for us to recognize Governor Phil Scott from the state of Vermont, up in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature—and your delegates, as well.

Further debate?

1710

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't have a lot of time to talk, just because the speaker before me went long, but I want to say that my wife is a principal and my two daughters are in the education sector.

I listened to question period today—and I'm glad the Premier is here listening to this—because in my riding, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, we had a school called Parliament Oak Public School. I listened to the Liberals answering all of the questions today, talking about the role that the MPP can play in school closures, and I played that role. I talked to the municipality. I talked to the higher level of government. I talked to the trustees. I talked to every single elected rep.

Then I met with the community. At the community meetings, we had 200 or 300 people. We had two or three of them. How many here have been to Niagara-on-the-Lake? That's a tight, tight community. They love their community. They love their old town.

We had a school that had a history and a heritage. It was called Parliament Oak for a reason. We did everything right, and do you know what happened to that school? We did everything we were supposed to, and the school closed. Now those kids—kindergarten kids and grade 1—are on a bus for an hour or an hour and a half every morning going to school. It's a school, by the way—Crossroads school—which is already overcrowded. Does that make sense?

So you stand up and answer in question period, and you say to the MPPs, “We want you to do your job. Go do your job in your community. Talk to all the stakeholders. Run your meetings. Talk to the trustees. Talk to the boards.” And you do everything right, and every single resident in Niagara-on-the-Lake and every single elected rep, whether they're at the school board, city

council or the higher level of government—which would be Ottawa and Ontario—everybody said, “Keep the school open.” It was that important to the community. It was a community hub. Do you know what happened?

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You guys should listen to this.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm listening to you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, because you know what? That's the problem with the system. A school in rural Ontario that was working—where the kids, by the way, had the highest math marks in Ontario, some of the best marks in Ontario—and we closed the school. We devastated the old town. What we could have done in that school—we could have made it a community hub.

And now what's happening—we see it, and nobody can deny this—is that people are leaving Toronto and the GTA, probably mostly because of the fact that housing has gotten expensive, and the young families are moving down to Niagara-on-the-Lake. The schools are bursting at the seams, and guess what we did? We closed a school. Does that make sense to anybody?

So when you answer the questions, please—I did everything right. I did everything right, and so did the community and so did the trustees and so did every other elected rep, and unfortunately we still lost our school. And do you know who it hurt? It didn't hurt me—I don't live in Niagara-on-the-Lake—but it hurt the kids, and that's what it should always be about.

I want to finish up, because I think I've only got a minute left.

Mr. Bill Walker: Aw, keep going.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, you might not like this part. The reality is that the PCs brought in the funding formula. It was a mistake then, and it's a mistake today. If you remember—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, no. You wanted to hear about this, because it's surprising that you brought this forward—to me, anyway; maybe not to everybody in the room.

Here's what happened under Harris, who was the Premier: We had days when they went across the province and shut down towns, whether it was London, Windsor or Niagara, but the biggest one that happened of those days of protest—do you know where it was? It was in Hamilton, and do you know how many people were there? There were 100,000 people in Hamilton protesting against the cuts to education and school closures in the province of Ontario. That's what happened there. Do you know how I know that?

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want everybody to hear this. Do you know how I knew that? I was the president of my local union, and I participated in that rally in support of teachers and making sure that our schools don't close in the province of Ontario.

Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the minister on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just want to take this opportunity to welcome another special guest: Councillor Matthew Green from Hamilton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Granville Anderson: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and speak to the motion presented by the Leader of the Opposition.

This morning, I heard the member from Whitby—Oshawa, who spoke about some public school being closed. I am familiar with that school because it happens to be in my riding. I visited that school last summer. There were 38 kids in that school—38 kids. I spoke to the teachers and the administrators, and they can't run programs with 38 kids. The school doesn't have a gym. They use a bus to transport the kids, for any extracurricular activities, to a school nearby, because that school is old and antiquated. I have a picture of that school here.

Interjection: It looks like a pioneer school.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Yes, it looks like a pioneer school.

The Durham District School Board wants to have that school slated for closure. There are three public elementary schools within 10 kilometres of that school.

Interjection.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Three.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Fact check.

Mr. Granville Anderson: The facts are here, Mr. Speaker. I will read from the paper:

"The Durham District School Board is conducting an accommodation review of four schools in Scugog. They're looking at a number of options, including closures and consolidation. As of October only 38 students are enrolled at Epsom Public School," and the projection for 2019 is that that will increase to 47 students, "so the board is looking at the possibility of moving those students." The schools that are being considered are Greenbank Public School, Prince Albert Public School and S.A. Cawker Public School, all within 10 kilometres.

During the consultations, the parents weren't thrilled with the school being moved, but their only concern was that the students move to one school. The board has agreed to do that, and the parents are a lot happier. That's their concern. They know that their kids will be better off. Programs couldn't be run.

I'm not saying this is indicative of our schools throughout the province or in rural communities; I'm only saying that I know of this one example. How many other examples of this are out there? The facts still matter in Ontario. It still matters here. These are the facts. I happen to know about that school. I wouldn't have known if I hadn't visited that school and known the situation surrounding that school.

I could say a lot more, Mr. Speaker, but my time is limited.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Windsor West, come to order.

Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: In People for Education's annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools, the report from 2016, there have been some interesting statistics. I'm providing my source.

Speaker, 91% of urban and suburban elementary schools report having a full-time special education teacher, compared to 66% in small-town and rural schools. Some 61% of urban/suburban elementary schools have a health and physical education teacher, compared to 30% of small-town and rural schools. Elementary schools in rural areas and small towns are less likely to have access to health and physical education, music and art teachers when compared to schools in urban and suburban locations. Speaker, I could go on and on.

The point here is that I asked the Premier a question this morning, and I mentioned that the requirements for northern and rural schools are very different than for urban schools. Our schools in the north and in rural Ontario have smaller populations. When you try to put these under review with this mould that is created that everybody has to fit into—I'll call it an urban-centric mould of larger institutions—the smaller institutions in the north and rural Ontario just don't match up with these new rules. These blanket regulations that have been put in by this government put our northern and rural schools clearly at a disadvantage. That we understand as well. Ninety-four per cent of urban and suburban secondary schools have full-time guidance counsellors, compared to 74% of small-town and rural schools. We're treated differently. That is the point I'm trying to make.

1720

Our rural and northern schools fall outside of the government's mould and are becoming at a high risk of closure. We hear it every day. We worry about it every day. I've got three high schools in North Bay—three high schools—that are talking about consolidating into one new school. This is the reality of what's happening in the north.

Earlier today, our leader, Patrick Brown, said, "When our MPPs debate today, we ask them to put the future of our children ahead of their own political agendas and support a publicly funded education system that demonstrates fairness to all students, no matter where they live."

I reiterate this. This is the time to put the needs of the kids first, and begin to understand that our needs in rural and northern Ontario are vastly different, and there is not one solution that fits all. If ever that expression rings true, it is in the case of the rural school closures.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Nickel Belt is made out of 33 little communities. I have been elected for the last 10 years, and for the last 10 years, every single year, one of

those communities loses their little school. The picture is always the same: The big school boards look at the school utilization, and they say, “Well, the schools in Nickel Belt are not used very much. Therefore, we will take those kids and bus them to the bigger schools in Sudbury.” I have seen this picture over and over and over, and I’m tired of it.

I can give the example of Our Lady of Fatima in Naughton. Naughton used to have this beautiful primary school, JK to grade 8. They had a nice gym. It was a nice school. It’s still a very good, sound building, but it is closed. It has been closed since 2006.

What happened in Naughton is typical of what happened to every little town. First, the school closed and they bused the kids out. Then the little restaurant closed, then the gas station closed, then the little community store closed, and there’s nothing left in Naughton. You can repeat this story over and over again.

The request from the PCs to put a moratorium on rural school closure—I suppose you have to define what constitutes “rural,” because there’s always a little bit of discrepancy there. But it needs to be done. This needs to stop.

I have kids in Nickel Belt that, although the school may be only 28 kilometres away from the school in Sudbury, those kids didn’t live near that school. They live on Panache Lake Road; they live on Fairbanks; they live on Grassy Lake. To go to the end of the road on Panache all the way to Lively is an hour and 20 minutes, and that’s when it doesn’t snow and it doesn’t rain.

Sure, the school was not an hour away, but the kids were being bused. Now we’ve added all of those kilometres. The same thing was playing out in the north part of my riding, where the school in Levack, the school in Dowling and the school in Chelmsford were all at risk of closing. That means that the kids on Geneva Lake, who already have an hour-long bus ride to get to their school, were going to be on a bus for another 40 minutes to get to the only school that would stay open.

We have to put a limit as to how long our kids are allowed to spend on a school bus, because for a four-year-old to spend more time on a bus than in his classroom is wrong. Do you know what happens? All those kids hate school. The kids are tired. They don’t like to be on the bus and they don’t like to go to school. Nothing good comes of that.

Why are we in this situation? Because of a funding formula that was there back when Mike Harris was there. The Premier and her entire team ran their 2003 election campaign on changing the formula. We’re in 2017 and we’re still stuck with the same old formula that works against the people who live in northern and rural Ontario. This has to change—the sooner the better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It’s unfortunate that I only have two minutes—really unfortunate. Let me just try this: It was a little bit rich when they passed that motion today. Speaker, 506 schools were closed, a few of them in my

riding. Let me tell you this: I’m going to be selfish and talk about my riding. In Brighton, there was a school with mould. They now have a new school.

Since they’re not revealing their plan, Speaker, let me tell you what their plan was in 2014. The then member Rob Milligan from Northumberland county—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I’d just like to remind all members that I’ve allowed some leniency. However, if you are going to continue the back-and-forth heckling, you need to be in your seat.

Back to the member.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, the time on the clock.

Rob Milligan had a plan when he was running for that party. The plan was a four-day school week. That was their plan. And do you know what? Lisa MacLeod was the education critic, and he conferred with her. That was the plan, a four-day school week. Now they come here and they want a moratorium? Bull.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I’m glad to stand up today and have my say for the riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London. It’s interesting, the debate that has gone on today. I think it has lost focus of what we’re trying to accomplish here today. We can talk of the olden days of Robarts or perhaps Bill Davis. We can throw mud at Bob Rae or Mike Harris. But we need to talk about what’s happening today.

This government in power has had 14 years to fix the funding model. They have not done so. It’s causing a problem in rural Ontario, which is causing the closing of schools. What we’re offering today is to put a moratorium on that so that we have a chance to save rural Ontario. Unfortunately, I think we’ve lost our track here. Hopefully, we get back on it and have a good-quality debate before we end.

Last year, the school board attempted to close two rural schools in my riding and send the students into London—Westminster and South Dorchester. We fought that, and the school board said, “Okay, we’ll hold off, but we’ll build a school in Belmont. We think that’s the greatest solution for those two.” However, when they brought out the EPAR, they set up so many schools to shut down in my riding, it was terrible.

We talked about Springfield school, which is the heart of the community of Springfield. It’s slated to close even though Malahide township deemed it an area for future growth. They’re going to shut that down.

Heather Derks is here today. She’s representing Sparta, a single-community school that is shutting down, even though it has had renovations, it’s almost full and it provides a full range for clubs, teams and intramurals.

Two weeks ago, I went to New Sarum school, which they’re going to shut down. The parents put on a breakfast program for all of their kids in the school. It’s a full school. The parents and teachers came out and said, “We can’t do this with a school of 500 to 700 students. It’s impossible.” The community that they’re developing

in these schools—this government is shutting them down. That's unfortunate.

The minister said today to make partnerships with Catholic schools. Well, there are no Catholic schools in the area to make partnerships with. She said to make partnerships with the French school board. The French school board has no schools in our county to make a partnership with.

These solutions reside with the municipalities, the parents and the community members, all of which have brought forth a number of solutions to fix the problem and keep the schools open. They're not listening. They need the help of this government to step in and put a hold on things until we have a process where the community and the parents are heard and we have solutions to keep rural schools open. I'm hoping the government looks forward, supports our motion and shuts this down.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise today on behalf of the residents of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry. Last fall, the board shocked the people of my riding with the release of a study highlighting the closure of 11 schools serving my riding, including six high schools. The community immediately rallied to fight the closures. Dozens of meetings were organized across the community, with hundreds of people showing up. Even just a couple of weeks ago, 1,000 people showed up at the meeting in Iroquois.

A rally was organized at Queen's Park and three busloads of residents came from my riding, weathering a storm, which was a snow day at home, just to show the Legislature how unhappy they were with the report and this Liberal government's new regulations that led to the planned closures of the over 600 schools across the province that were slated.

Providing a good education for our youth is the key to our success, and theirs as well. This Liberal government stands up and shouts that it supports rural schools, but in their actions we see anything but.

In March 2015, just a few months after the last election, this government revised regulations governing school closures to remove the impact of the school on the community and the economic benefits to the community. They say it's up to the local school boards to make the local decisions, but what they don't say is that the boards must follow these regulations or they will be penalized through even further budget cuts.

The board resorted to a letter just issued by the minister last night that everything was fixed, but we hear everything else but that from the board. Nothing has changed.

Back in November 2016, I tabled the following motion:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government should place a moratorium on rural school closures and suspend pupil accommodation reviews until it has developed a long-term plan for rural education by

consulting with all local rural school boards, school communities, students, and municipalities and that it considers the value of local education, ensures students receive a quality education that includes access to important extracurricular activities and after-school employment, and that it establishes a stable, sustainable funding formula for rural areas."

Speaker, municipalities across my riding and across the province passed resolutions in support.

Education is not only important; it is expensive. In today's Ontario, there's only one taxpayer, and it's up to this government to ensure that our tax dollars are spent as efficiently as possible. It is time to review how we spend tax dollars to ensure the many ministries work together to get the biggest bang for the buck.

Our American friends seem to do a much better job at it. Living in a border community, I often attend sports activities in upper New York state, an area that is very similar to that of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. At Salmon River, the elementary school is connected to the high school, which is connected to the arena and the swimming pool. The school operates during the day and the community uses it at night.

We need to review how we provide services for our taxpayers and how we fund them. To do it right, we need to complete this before we close or destroy any more of the local assets, including our schools.

We ask the government to do the right thing: put in place a moratorium on school closures and review our education system to make it the best it can be. The people of Ontario deserve the best. They deserve the best from this government, and it's time this government steps up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I've been here in this House as an elected member for over five years, and today is one of those days where you can't believe what you're seeing in here.

The fact that the opposition party has brought in a motion to call on the government to put a moratorium on closures of rural schools, when the funding formula that they brought in when they were in government is in direct relation to why we have rural school closures, absolutely shocks me. It's unbelievable, and not one mention in their motion to allude to the fact that that funding formula is the major reason why schools close in our province, and in rural Ontario. There is absolutely a direct correlation.

In 2003, the McGuinty Liberals promised during the election to change the funding formula, to reverse it, to include enough adequate funding so that rural schools and schools across the—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, when the Premier heckles you, you know their party is in trouble. You know that their party is desperate—absolutely. It's interesting to hear that.

They promised to change the funding formula, and they have done absolutely nothing. They've made the

situation worse. They've exacerbated the problem in my riding, in ridings across this province, because they are not only fiscally bankrupt but morally bankrupt. When you see them claim to do anything for education in this province, it is not the truth. They haven't worked to the benefit of communities, and especially on a day where we're celebrating agriculture literacy day. They have no idea about rural Ontario and no idea about the need to maintain small schools in rural Ontario. You know, 100-acre, 200-acre parcels—you drive past them and you see flat land, barren land. We see major economic impact. Yes, those areas aren't as densely populated as some of the urban areas, but they are just as meaningful to the economy of the province of Ontario.

Yes, there are schools in those small hamlets—like Harrow and Stoney Point and Woodslee—that might not have the same amount of pupils, but they deserve access to education in their communities just like people do in urban areas.

Interjection: They shouldn't be on buses for an hour.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They should not be on buses for hours.

We've done everything that this government has asked us to do. We worked with our municipalities; we worked with private stakeholders in the communities; we worked with parents; we went to the meetings; we talked. The decision was preordained to close Harrow high school. It was done before we even entered the process. And what has the government done to indicate that they have fixed it? They've truncated that process. They've made it shorter, so that parents can't voice their concerns and businesses can't talk about the economic impact.

Your legacy on education in this province is perhaps most telling in the recent polling numbers that you have for your party: 11% and 9%. You could not have done less for our communities.

But it is, in fact, a shame that now we have to listen to the opposition party lambaste you when they are the ones who brought into effect the funding formula that continues to fail us and continues to be governed by the Liberal Party. A pox on both of your houses. Our communities know, after the last 14 years, who has been at the helm during the school closures. It started with the Conservatives, it was exacerbated by the Liberals, and it's going to end on election day when the Liberals get ousted from this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to rise to speak to this very timely motion. This is timely for the residents of Parry Sound–Muskoka because just last week, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, under this government's flawed pupil accommodation review policies, voted to proceed with the closure of Our Lady of Mercy elementary school in Honey Harbour. This will mean that, as of next year, Catholic school students will either be bused to Victoria Harbour or they could attend Honey Harbour Public School.

Unfortunately, attending the local public school may not be an option for these students or any other children

of Honey Harbour. The Trillium Lakelands District School Board is also considering closing Honey Harbour Public School. A decision on the future of this school is expected next month. Depending on the decision regarding the public elementary school, the town of Honey Harbour could be left with no elementary school.

In November, when I raised this issue in question period, the Premier spoke about encouraging school boards to co-locate with smaller schools. Again, today, when I questioned the Premier, the Premier said that she was requiring school boards to work together. It seems that in Honey Harbour, that did not happen. A moratorium on school closures would allow the time for boards to find ways to work together to maintain a local school.

1740

In fact, just yesterday, one day before this motion was scheduled for debate, the minister sent a letter to school boards stating that: "Communities and the province expect Ontario's four school systems to maximize the opportunities of co-location. Prior to commencing with student accommodation changes through closures, it is our government's strong preference that school boards fully explore joint accommodation arrangements with coterminous boards, particularly to maintain a school presence in a rural or isolated community."

Mr. Speaker, that's Honey Harbour. For the kids, if both those schools close—the kids in the public system—the next closest primary school is Glen Orchard. That's over an hour on a bus for primary-aged kids, which is just not practical. Not only that, it's a huge blow for the community of Honey Harbour, as families won't want to locate there because there's no school and as businesses don't locate there because there's no school. So it's very, very important that we maintain one school in Honey Harbour.

Another community in my riding that is concerned about the school closures is Gravenhurst. Based on the government's flawed accommodation policy, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board is planning a pupil accommodation review for Gravenhurst High School. I don't want to contribute to the speculation that the school will close, but it's important to discuss the impacts a closure would have, as part of the debate today.

Gravenhurst has had a local high school since 1896, with the current high school building dating back to 1951. The high school is a cornerstone of the community. Sixteen-year-old Gravenhurst High School student Isaac Speicher wrote to me to express his concerns. Here's what he had to say about the importance of Gravenhurst High School:

"I am from Muskoka and I go to Gravenhurst High School. I am sending this letter to you today addressing an issue I have about what the board wants to do to my school. The plan is to amalgamate Gravenhurst High School and Bracebridge high school.

"I think that this is an important issue because without a school in Gravenhurst there won't be much of a reason for people to stay. Also, without a school in Gravenhurst there won't be any new people coming to the community.

“The schools combining affects teens like me because if we have jobs in Gravenhurst and we go to Bracebridge, it is harder for us to get to our jobs on time, which makes it harder to have a job. I feel that a smaller school is better because you know everyone there and we feel like one big family. It is also easier for teachers to help kids one-on-one so that they can do better. I hope that you can take my ideas into consideration and keep Gravenhurst and Bracebridge two different schools.”

First of all, I want to commend Isaac for taking an interest in the issue and voicing his opinion. Isaac raises some important points. A longer commute to school would make it very difficult for high school students to maintain part-time jobs.

In closing, rural and northern schools are at a disadvantage under this government’s accommodation review policies. The issues faced by these schools, like the role of the school in the community and the distance between schools, have not been recognized by this Premier and this government.

Speaker, communities like Honey Harbour and Gravenhurst deserve better. The government needs to take into consideration the role of local schools in these smaller communities. We need a moratorium on rural school closures until the government can review the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: This is such a timely and important motion that we’re debating today to really best address the ongoing struggles faced by our rural schools that are increasingly under attack due to the policies and guidelines set by this government.

When I speak of that struggle, Speaker, I speak from experience. In fact, every last one of our MPPs in this House who represents areas with rural and northern constituencies shares that experience. Last night, in fact, marked the final meeting where delegates’ desperate pleas to save St. Agatha elementary school in Wilmot township in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga were heard once again by the Waterloo Catholic board. Of course, I was there in attendance at the meeting. I witnessed students, parents, community members and staff who were very emotional, frankly, at this meeting.

While there’s no lack of passion, of course, in Wilmot township to protect the ongoing life of their community school, this is actually the third time in nine years that parents have had to marshal the troops to again fight to save their beloved St. Agatha school. In fact, St. Agatha school and the community in Wilmot celebrated over 145 years within the community, a significant celebration that I also was able to attend. I saw the bond those students from generation after generation who went to that school—grandparents, great-grandparents, parents and now the kids today.

As I noted this morning, even further concerning than this third strike by the board in Wilmot is the fact that it was just over two years ago that parents thought they could breathe easier after their last battle to save the

school had finally come to an end. And yet, there we were again last night, making those same arguments to save the same rural school this government’s new review rules allowed to be placed right back up on the chopping block.

To be clear, school closure review is an arduous and painful process for all impacted, which begs the question as to why the ministry almost encourages boards to drag families and their local communities through this struggle again and again until the school closure can actually be achieved.

Speaker, while I and many frustrated parents questioned how we could be going back into a review process so soon after the last ARC review, it turns out that while parents rejoiced in saving their school back in 2014, the ministry was busy changing the rules of the game, scrapping the once-in-a-five-year-period rule to allow an accommodation review any time the school board wants. If at first you don’t succeed, just change the rules and, of course, try again. So now, not only can boards across the province turn to rural school closure to meet the bottom line, but the ministry is making it easier and faster to do so.

Look, we all recognize that the Wynne government’s elimination of top-up funding that specifically went to support small and rural schools has put boards across the province in a difficult position. I looked into the eyes of the trustees last night—and I know we’ve heard from folks in the House who were formerly trustees. I recall hearing from the member for Windsor West, and I know she has had the experience of closing schools in the past, so it’s perhaps a bit rich to be here talking about that today.

But look, for that reason, as we all call for an immediate moratorium and seek immediate review of guidelines, we are also working towards province-wide solutions to our province-wide problem. We’ve asked the minister to immediately engage all school boards, school communities and local municipalities in a review of the current challenges presented by declining enrolment. They’re different.

I think it’s essential that we all work together to save our rural schools so that families, communities and boards alike aren’t forced to consider further unnecessary school closures. To do otherwise ignores the vital importance that our rural schools bring to our rural communities and brings us back to the closure debate again and again.

No one wants to go back there, Speaker. So I’ll conclude by repeating our call for an immediate moratorium on rural school closure and a review of the accommodation guidelines.

Save our schools. Save St. Agatha. Save the rest of the schools in rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Brown has moved opposition day motion number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”
All those opposed to the motion, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1748 to 1758.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All members, please take your seats.

Mr. Brown has moved opposition day motion number 1. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte
Arnott, Ted	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm
Bailey, Robert	Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul
Barrett, Toby	Gretzky, Lisa	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Hardeman, Ernie	Smith, Todd
Brown, Patrick	Harris, Michael	Vanthof, John
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Hatfield, Percy	Walker, Bill
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Wilson, Jim
Coe, Lorne	Mantha, Michael	Yakubski, John
Fedeli, Victor	Martow, Gila	Yurek, Jeff
Forster, Cindy	McDonell, Jim	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Dong, Han	McGarry, Kathryn
Anderson, Granville	Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor
Baker, Yvan	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted
Ballard, Chris	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridi, Reza
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric	Murray, Glen R.
Chan, Michael	Hunter, Mitzie	Naqvi, Yasir
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	Malhi, Harinder	Thibeault, Glenn
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Vernile, Daiene
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Martins, Cristina	Wong, Soo
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Mauro, Bill	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 32; the nays are 51.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HYDRO RATES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given on March 2, 2017 by the Minister of Energy.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): As I mentioned earlier, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer given to a question given on March 2, 2017, by the Minister of Energy. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or his parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I now turn it over to the member of Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I wish to expand on my question in this House concerning the ever-skyrocketing business and industrial electricity rates. Speaker, you may know that during pre-budget hearings, Canada's iconic Maple Leaf Foods told our finance committee that their company's electricity bill jumped 18% just last year, to \$19.7 million. This is across all of their Ontario plants.

As Maple Leaf Vice-President Rory MacAlpine explained, "Maple Leaf Foods is a well-established, long-established manufacturing business in Ontario. As of today, we have 13 plants in the province. We employ 5,100 people"—actually down a little bit over the last few years; the reason for that being the "enormous capital investment in modern, technologically advanced plants that, in fact, do employ fewer people but ... at a higher level of productivity, efficiency and, ultimately, potential for growth."

Now, Maple Leaf, "unlike many other food manufacturers, have made the decision to remain fully committed on this side of the Canada-US border. In the last five years, we've spent nearly \$600 million in new capital just in ... plants here in Ontario."

Maple Leaf "put a focus on the electricity pricing issue because it's very material to the operating costs of any manufacturing plant" involved in cooling, freezing—cooking, for example, in the food industry—high-intensive, energy-intensive processes. In 2016, we consumed 124 million kilowatt hours of electricity at an average rate increase of 2.4 cents a kilowatt, so that meant that our electricity price to run these 13 plants increased by 18% in 2016, reaching nearly \$20 million that year. That's factoring in the industrial conservation initiative—I know the Minister of Energy made mention of that in his response to me last week—the energy conservation initiative, which does apply a rebate to their largest plant. It's a new facility in Hamilton, Ontario.

There have been a number of initiatives promised by the government; expanding the industrial conservation initiative is one of them. The concern of Maple Leaf is that the "medium-sized plants, the so-called 'class B' ratepayers—will now simply have to bear more of the costs to offset the benefit or the increased availability of this subsidy for the larger users."

The 18% is obviously a large increase. It's not only that; it's been highly unpredictable, because this is all driven by the global adjustment. These plants are very sophisticated in their ability to forecast, to budget, to hedge commodity price variations, and to do that in respect of their energy needs, but they simply cannot very well predict what that global adjustment will be.

The result is that their business is impacted to that extent. Probably one of the most serious problems for business and industry is uncertainty and lack of ability to plan for the future—in this case, to plan for some of these future horrendous cost increases.

To summarize, the savings that Maple Leaf would enjoy if they had moved these plants to other jurisdictions—I've mentioned this before in the House. If they moved to Manitoba, they would have a 65% savings on their electricity bill. Now, they're not moving everything to Manitoba, but there are many other industries and businesses that would be tempted by that kind of a savings. If they had moved to Saskatchewan—this would be the lowest accrued cost savings, at 39%. If they had moved their plants to New York state, they would have saved 47%.

That's just one industry, a well-known industry within the agri-food and agri-business sector. I know there's another plant down in my riding where, again, the global adjustment fee is killing them. A big surprise—they got an astounding bill just before Christmas of \$107,698. You cannot plan and wriggle your way out of those kinds of surprise hits on your price of electricity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to respond to my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk. I am actually very glad that he chose as an example Maple Leaf Foods, because from my constituency office in Meadowvale, I'm walking distance from Maple Leaf Foods. I've been in there. I've met their people. I've talked with them, and I've been briefed on their business.

I do want to talk a little bit about some of the variables that a company like Maple Leaf Foods could, and indeed should, take into account when looking at different competitive jurisdictions. If they were to move to the United States, they would face the same or higher electricity costs. Taxes in the United States, all in, are generally higher. In Canada, particularly where they are, in north-west Mississauga, they are directly adjacent to an educated, skilled, experienced workforce. They have ready access to transportation, to markets and to raw materials.

While the member mentioned the comparative difference between Ontario and Manitoba, I would like to point out to him that the price of electricity has always been less expensive in Manitoba, it remains less expensive now, and it will be less expensive in the future. But the flow of business is not from Ontario to Manitoba, or indeed Quebec; it's the other way around, where firms tend to leave those jurisdictions and to come to Ontario for some of the main reasons that I've just mentioned.

Maple Leaf Foods would also benefit, as will its employees, from the province's recent initiatives in lowering electricity prices. Their employees will benefit from an electricity price that, on average, will drop about 25%, while holding increases to the rate of inflation over at

least the next four years. In the case of Maple Leaf Foods, industrial rates—and let's use northern and southern Ontario—in northern Ontario are among the lowest in Canada, and are, indeed, lower than 49 of the US 50 states. In southern Ontario, industrial electricity rates are lower than in most of the surrounding Great Lakes states—indeed, lower than other jurisdictions that a firm of the scale and scope of Maple Leaf Foods could conceivably move to. I would point out in that respect California and New Jersey.

As well, the comparisons made by the member are just the base cost—in other words, the sticker price. What they don't account for are the many programs that Ontario offers to firms like Maple Leaf Foods, such as the industrial conservation initiative, which has helped many companies in Ontario save as much as one third on their bills by asking them whether or not there are processes and plants that they can move off of peak time and on to off-peak time. The program has been such a success that as the province has gotten experience with how people use the program, it has been able to successively lower the threshold.

This is one thing that Ontario has done and done better than surrounding jurisdictions. It has been bold enough to try something, to watch the patterns in how a program is used and then to adjust the program. In science, we call this experimentation. You don't really get a feel for how well your theory is going to hold up unless you watch how your experiment behaves. You normally have to watch it behave over and over again to have a base of knowledge from which you can look at it and say, "We can either expand it or change it." That's what Ontario has done with its many programs that benefit residential, small business, commercial and industrial users, and industrial users of many classes.

For example, in the food and beverage manufacturing industry: Since 2013, this industry, composed of businesses very much like Maple Leaf Foods, has seen 41 new plants opened, 61 plants expanded, nearly 3,000 new jobs—good jobs, well-paying jobs, high-skill jobs—created, and more than \$750 million in investment—three quarters of a billion dollars of investment—by firms similar to Maple Leaf Foods. It's a reflection of just how strong that food processing industry is in our province.

While energy is certainly a very important input, there are many others as well in which Ontario enjoys now and has enjoyed a substantive competitive advantage for years and years.

I thank the member for having brought it up, and I appreciate the opportunity to give him a fulsome response to his question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
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McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	

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Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
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Soo Wong
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