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**Official Report
of Debates
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**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 3 November 2009

Mardi 3 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 3 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 3 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOOD GOVERNMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA SAINTE GESTION PUBLIQUE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 2, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts / Projet de loi 212, Loi visant à promouvoir une saine gestion publique en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois et en édictant deux nouvelles lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I move the following amendment:

That the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting therefor the words “that the bill be not now read a second time but be referred back to the government with instructions to:

“(1) Reintroduce those sections of the bill pertaining to the Municipal Elections Act as a separate bill.”

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bisson has moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting therefor the words “that the bill be not now read a second time but be referred back to the government with instructions to:

“(1) Reintroduce those sections of the bill pertaining to the Municipal Elections Act as a separate bill.”

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think that amendment kind of speaks for itself. I want to say again to the government: Understand that we are not trying to be deleterious here. You need to understand what we're up to.

We understand there are sections of this bill that are, quite frankly, time-sensitive—the municipal election will

be next year—and we understand far too well the implications of holding up this entire bill, including that section of that bill that would deal with the Municipal Elections Act; it would cause a problem for our municipal partners here in Ontario. That's why we're suggesting to you that you remove that section of the bill out, you reintroduce that section of the bill as a separate bill and then we would be very amenable to allowing that bill to go forward so that you can get passage before Christmas so it's enacted before January 1, which is the time deadline you need for the municipal election.

Your changes to the Municipal Elections Act are a step in the right direction. They're not everything we want, but we consider them better than not doing anything at all. Therefore, we would support that. But then it would allow us to take the rest of the bill and give it proper time so that we can really have ourselves, as members of this Legislature, along with the public and those people who are interested in those amended acts, a look at this omnibus bill in some detail and determine if there are things that need to be changed. Because I remind the government House leader that we've had it happen plenty of times in this place where governments have introduced omnibus bills only to come back and amend their own omnibus bills numerous times after because, quite frankly, errors were made in the drafting. It's not that the people who are drafting it aren't doing their jobs; it's simply that it's a huge bill. There's lots in it, and sometimes errors are made. We just need to make sure that in fact the bill does do what the government intends for it to do, and if there are people who have a problem with those particular amendments to these bills, that they have a chance to have their say.

Trying to pass all of that before the end of this session, which will be the second or third week of December, I think is unreasonable, so we're trying to find a middle ground, give the government those parts of the bill that they need, and we'll support that, but allow those other parts of the bill to go to committee. I'm looking for some support from the government House leaders and others in order to be able to move in that direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just in terms of this bill, again we've heard basically from the opposition that the bill is too thick. That has been their main argument; it's too many pages. I know in the past they stood up and argued, “The bill is only three pages. The bill is too short.” This has been the basic crux of their argument, but it doesn't really hold water.

I think that the member opposite, the member for Timmins–James Bay, is doing his part in opposition to criticize the bill or the government, and that’s his job. But on the other hand, he has done very little to look at the necessary parts of the bill that cross many ministries, which all governments have done in order to catch up to a lot of technical interpretations that have to be adjusted from time to time.

The government has given ample opportunity to both opposition parties to be briefed on it with ministry staff. In fact, the Attorney General said that they can come and get more briefings at any time if they want. But to stand up here for—I think they were here for three, four hours yesterday just complaining about the thickness of the bill; that was their argument. And now they say they want to decide which sections should be in or out. Well, if they decide on one section, then what about the other sections? Again, they say, “We haven’t had time. It’s too thick. It’s too complicated for us.” Well, their job is to look at the bill and make some valid criticisms based on the content, not on the thickness of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. John O’Toole: I did have the privilege last evening to speak on Bill 212, and I think we’ll be holding debate on this for some time. But I want to make it clear that this is an omnibus bill. It’s actually a distraction from the other trouble the government’s in—the \$25-billion deficit, \$100 million in consulting fees, the whole eHealth scandal, ministerial resignations. There you have it.

This is sort of like playing Jeopardy! here this morning because there are so few people here. I thought I’d read a quote and see if they can tell me who may have said that. It reads as follows, “This omnibus, megabill approach to legislation makes for bad legislation.” I’m quoting here, so I’m going to have to give this to Hansard.

I want you all to follow me and say slowly, “Public hearings.” These two words go nicely if you believe in true democracy, if you recognize that public input is one of the tools that make for good legislation. If you really believe in this tool, instead of saying the same old-fashioned things—who do you think said that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Michael Colle.

Mr. John O’Toole: No. Actually, Michael Colle wasn’t allowed to participate in those days as much as today. He’s the whip. It was Dalton McGuinty in 1999. Those are Dalton McGuinty’s famous words. I’m going to repeat them: “This omnibus, megabill approach to legislation makes for bad legislation.” And it’s not good for democracy.

Clearly, in what they’ve got buried in here, I uncovered two pieces of information: one on cancelling legislation retroactively—legislation that has already been passed, voted on, duly debated and discoursed on in the House, and then it’s been cancelled retroactively. It’s malicious in that way, but in other ways as well. In know in section 16—there’s a section that’s worth looking at:

nuclear waste. It’s changing the rules around nuclear waste. And in my section, section 17, it talks about titles to property. So, it’s a very—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina.

0910

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I’m going to be supporting this motion, of course, because it’s eminently reasonable. I should point out that all governments have done this in the past. I remember the infamous Bill 26, which was introduced by the Tories many years ago. It was of similar length, and we all complained and attacked. It’s the usual kind of thing.

My only complaint against the Liberal government is that they are calling this bill—or at least in the explanatory note: “The bill is part of the government initiative to promote good government.” I had so much fun with that line. I was roaring with laughter. My complaint in my speech is going to be 20 minutes on that kind of balderdash that we put into bills.

Look, this is housekeeping, by and large. We never really get much done to debate the bill. That’s generally the case. But to call this a good-government kind of initiative versus housekeeping—come on. It reminds me of the Tory bill, the Tenant Protection Act. I had a laugh with that one, because it wasn’t about protecting tenants; it was about protecting developers. So when you call this bill a good-governance bill, I tell you, I just can’t take it. I have to, of course, prepare myself to attack the government as best I can and use as many minutes as I have to be able to do that and to then say, in the brief 30 seconds that I have left, to say to my colleague from Timmins–James Bay—he’s dead on.

The only substantive amendments that have anything to do with some substance are the changes to the Municipal Act. We deserve to debate that separately from this. That’s the argument my colleague makes that I believe the Liberals are missing the point on—either deliberately or otherwise. But that is the essence of the point: We should separate these two. By and large, most of these other housekeeping changes we can live with. But the other needs a real debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? Yes, the House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I’m pleased to be able to participate in the debate this morning and to respond to some of the comments that have been made by those opposite.

As the member for Trinity–Spadina noted, every government has introduced a good-government bill. In fact, the NDP in 1994 were the first government to introduce such a large bill that really is a housekeeping bill that looks at—

Interjection: Number one.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Yeah, they’re proud to be the first. We’ve had, since 1997, 16 good-government bills. What was that? It wasn’t good back then? I think that you probably would have argued the opposite on that back then. We’ve had 16 good-government bills, and

these good-government bills look at how we can improve different pieces of legislation. As all of the members of the Legislature know, times change. We have new technology, we have new-term terminology, we have new names of ministries, and as part of that we have to update our legislation. We find ourselves at a couple of junctures in our mandate looking at how we can clean up the legislation and improve the system for all those who use government services.

We use these good-government legislations to enable us to have these amendments and move these things forward—things that would not be able to sustain a piece of legislation on their own. I know that my friends in the third party are well aware that this is what is happening. Our friends on both sides have been given ample opportunity to have a briefing. We have offered briefings since we told them about the legislation over two weeks ago. We have offered them the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Ministry of the Attorney General and various ministries to talk about the amendments. We are moving forward. We are pleased to be moving forward.

My friend from Timmins–James Bay has introduced an amendment which we will not be supporting, because we feel that we have plenty of time here this morning, and again yesterday afternoon, for a number of hours—despite the bell-ringing—we had a number of hours of debate. There's ample opportunity for everyone in this House to provide us with their opinions. This will go to committee, as all of our legislation does, and they will have ample opportunity there again to speak to it. I appreciate the opportunity this morning to speak to it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Timmins–James Bay to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank all members, but I want to speak first to the points made by the government House leader. I want you to understand: My argument isn't that we're doing this because we didn't have enough time to read the bill; that ain't the point. Yes, it's true, the government introduced this bill and there wasn't sufficient time to be able to prep for debate on Monday, but that's not the reason we introduced the amendment whatsoever. The reason we introduced the amendment was that we recognize that you're trying to get this entire bill past third reading within the next four sessional weeks we have here in the Legislature. We're here for this week and for three more weeks after the break on November 11 and you want to get this bill passed in that record time. We're saying that this particular bill has a whole bunch of things in it that people need to scrutinize much more, and to do so, they need some time. That's why we suggested to the government that we delay the third reading and we give it some time in committee this winter so that we can actually pass the bill later on this spring, in February or March, when we come back here in the Legislature.

The government is still going to get their bill in the end, but the real winners are going to be the public,

because they will have an opportunity to speak to those parts of the bill that they either support or don't support. I just think that when it comes to omnibus bills, we need to take our time and do it right.

We understand that in the bill, there are sections that you need to get before January 1, and those are the changes to the Municipal Act. What we're saying to you is that we get it; we understand. We're not going to hold up the changes to the Municipal Act, because there is a municipal election coming in 2010. You may not have done everything we wanted in the Municipal Act, but it's a step in the right direction, and we recognize that these changes are needed for the next municipal election.

That's why I believe our amendment is quite reasonable in saying, we'll allow you to pass that section by third reading within the next four weeks by reintroducing it as another bill, then allow a second reading debate to happen on the rest of the bill, and then from there, send it out to committee later on in January or February and have third reading later on in February or March. You'll get your bill and the public will be satisfied.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you going up?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's okay; I'm just surprised they didn't get up.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Liberals obviously don't want to discuss this. That's okay—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Can I ask for unanimous consent that we defer back to the Tories so that we can allow them to do their lead?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Do we have unanimous consent? Yes.

The member for Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I was amazed that the Liberals didn't want to address this bill. However, I was amazed this morning when I got to my office. I opened the computer—I know how to do that now—and the quote of the day popped up, which I thought was interesting. The quote of the day was from Kin Hubbard, and his quote was, "Now and then, an innocent man is sent to the Legislature." I thought that was very appropriate for this morning.

I would say that I'm going to share my time with my critic from Burlington when the time comes.

I would also like to comment on how the minister, in his opening remarks, talked extensively about how this bill will scope various inquiries that are called by the government. It should also be noted that the new requirements made by this bill for calling an inquiry are somewhat more difficult to satisfy than in the past; therefore public inquiries will be more difficult. We've been calling for a public inquiry into the eHealth scandal, where this government has allowed \$1 billion of taxpayers' money to be distributed to their friends in the

consulting business, and consultants hiring consultants and so on and so on. We've read that in the newspapers; we've talked about it ad nauseam. The government is making it more difficult to call those public inquiries.

But the minister went to some length talking about how this bill will be able to scope inquiries, join different inquiries together. They focus on how an inquiry is going to start, making it somewhat more difficult. They talk about the process. This bill talks about the budgeting of the process and needing ministerial approval for those budgetings. As the inquiry goes on, the minister continues to have control over the budget. Ostensibly, if the inquiry was going badly, the minister could withdraw the budget or at least shorten the budget and therefore control the inquiry process.

0920

As I read the bill, I find that this is all about control and controlling the inquiry process as opposed to any accountability or creating any transparency that might be evident if this bill truly was a bill about good government. In my comments when the bill was introduced, I mentioned that, if this is good government, what came before? The obvious answer might be that there was bad government. And if this bill is to correct that bad government, it does a very poor job of correcting bad government, because I think that this bill continues with that tradition.

I would also like to begin by outlining in greater detail some of the serious concerns we have with the procedure used by the Liberal government to introduce this bill. The opposition is elected by the people to ensure good, accountable and transparent government on their behalf.

Bill 212 is over 300 pages long. It came with a compendium close to 100 pages and a 37-page explanation note. It includes 26 schedules. It's a huge tome. There are 36 pages of explanatory notes and 26 schedules.

Schedule 2 alone amends 79 different pieces of legislation. Schedule 21 significantly amends the Municipal Act. Schedule 5 and schedule 6 introduce two completely new bills. I think that's going a little above and beyond: When you introduce two completely new bills in an omnibus bill, I think it does discourage debate surrounding specific pieces of legislation.

I would assume that the government is going to—and that might be a difficult thing to do—give favourable timelines for debate on this bill. I hope they will give favourable timelines for committee on this bill. However, I am very suspicious. Having been in this Legislature for 14 years, I've developed some suspicion of what this opposition—what this government might do—soon-to-be opposition. I suspect that we're going to see a time allocation motion on this bill sometime in the future. I hope that time allocation bill is in the distant future.

I heard a rumour that you want to pass this bill by December, and I find that ludicrous when a bill of this size, affecting 22 different ministries, is going to be debated in a brief period of time and when the people of Ontario will want to comment on this bill during the

committee process. That committee process could take weeks and weeks.

The organization of the bill as a whole is very difficult. A single act is amended in various different schedules of the bill, making any comprehensible understanding of the overall changes very difficult and very time-consuming, because you have to go through the bill, you pick out the various changes to a piece of legislation and then you have to arrange those changes back in. So the organization of this bill has been—I don't know if it has been purposeful, but it has been organized in such a way that has made it very difficult for the opposition to pull that together, especially given the very short time frame.

Before Bill 212 was introduced, the Liberals were tight-lipped with the opposition about what they were introducing. We had no idea an omnibus bill of this size was coming down. We had only our ideas about what the Liberals were going to do. We knew that the selection of juries was under some difficulty and that a bill would be coming forth to fix that. Yes, that is included in here, and that's probably one of the good parts of this bill. However, we had no idea that there was going to be such an extensive bill passed or brought to the House when this was introduced.

We were wondering whether this bill would create a larger bureaucracy, which would follow the Liberal pattern, but we did not know. With the billion-dollar eHealth scandal, the \$2.5-billion harmonized sales tax grab and the massive \$24.7-billion deficit, the official opposition hoped this would be a good-government bill in order to fix some of these disasters. I must say that we were disappointed.

These billion-dollar scandals are coming at a time when Ontario's unemployment rate is a whopping 9.2%; we're approaching double-digit unemployment in this province. As recently as last month, Statistics Canada noted that "Ontario has suffered the fastest rate of employment losses since October [2008]," which was 2.9%, "mostly in full-time and in manufacturing, construction and a number of service industries." Those are full-time jobs. Those are jobs that support families. Those are jobs that support dreams. Those are jobs that are lost to Ontario, along with the hopes and dreams that those families had.

I hoped that this would be a good-government bill. I hoped these scandals would be addressed. I hoped this bill would bring Ontario back to being the number one province in this country economically, driving the economic engine, driving this country forward. However, again, I was disappointed.

On so many levels, this is not a good-government bill, and my hopes for the people of Ontario are not great at this point in time. But the people of Ontario are extremely resilient, and they will have the opportunity to bring this province back. It won't be the government that brings it back—government policies perhaps—but the people of Ontario are the ones who will make it work. Their work ethic and their level of education and know-

ledge and their skill levels will bring this province back to its rightful place as the engine of economic growth in this country. However, under this government we haven't seen the kind of legislation that's going to make that happen.

The timing of this bill makes me wonder if the Liberals hoped that the staffing resources of the opposition would be diverted from representing the people of Ontario, that we would be forced to put aside the scandals and spending abuses rocking the Liberal government to review these 600 provisions that are presented in this bill. The PC caucus and our staff have reviewed this bill. We do not have the huge government support that the government has in examining this bill in its entirety, but we'll represent the people in debate. We encourage interested groups and the people of Ontario to contact us with their concerns. We'll address them, and we encourage the people of Ontario to make themselves available to the committee process and to express those concerns to the government of Ontario. Surely a bill of this size will travel the length and breadth of this great province.

But we will not let this bill divert us from continuing to uncover the scandals that the Liberal government has been saddled with in their summer of scandal. We will not let this bill stop us from calling for Liberal accountability when it comes to how Ontario's hard-earned tax dollars are spent—and in the case of this government, how our hard-earned tax dollars are wasted. We will not let this bill stop us from representing your concerns here on the floor of this Legislature.

We were provided a 324-page bill that on so many levels is not good government. This bill was created after the work of 22 different ministries; we were given 15 minutes after the bill was introduced to review those 600-or-so provisions before commenting. The public only got a look at this bill in its entirety yesterday when it was put up on the website. Providing the opposition with nothing, the Liberals leaked Bill 212 to the media. This Liberal practice slapped democracy in the face. This Liberal practice denied the people of Ontario fairness and a strong voice. This is not accountable or transparent; it is definitely not good government.

The Attorney General highlighted—and I could point out that from the accountability point of view there are a number of acts that this bill affects; for instance, the Collection Agencies Act. Subsection 3(3) of the bill removes the director's supervision of the registrar's performance of his or her duties. It seems to me that that makes it less accountable in that bill. The Consumer Reporting Act: It does the same thing. It removes the director's supervision of the registrar's performance of his or her duties. The Film Classification Act: Again, it removes the director's supervision. The Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act: Again, it removes the director's supervision. There are nine acts which that same clause follows—the director's supervision of the registrar is removed. That does not give me confidence that this government is becoming more accountable. It is removing accountability from the civil servants.

0930

Also, in the Ministry of Culture, there are eight different acts which remove the accountability of one representative or another.

All of those things bring less accountability to the governance of this province and make it more difficult for taxpayers to ensure that their tax dollars are being well spent.

The Attorney General highlighted the amendment to the Juries Act when he introduced Bill 212. This is one section of close to 600. He spoke briefly about the new Public Inquiries Act, and that is one section of 26. He said Bill 212 will ensure “the people of this province are well served by their government.” Fifteen minutes later, after the Liberals had leaked the bill to the media, they asked the official opposition to respond. Is this how the Liberal government serves the people of Ontario? Is this how they define good government? Is this representative of their democracy? I say, too bad for Ontario.

The Liberals slapped democracy in the face a second time when they provided one working day and the weekend for the opposition to review the 600 provisions and respond again. We worked hard and diligently for these three days to ensure that we could serve the people of Ontario in this chamber. We reviewed and examined those 324 pages, and we found that this is not just a housekeeping bill and it is not always a good-government bill. Tucked within these 600 provisions, 324 pages and two new acts are some significant changes that I have serious concerns about. I would like to voice my extreme disapproval on how the Liberal government has handled this bill. It is undemocratic, it is bad government and it is not serving the people of Ontario well.

Schedule 2, which is 56 pages long and amends 79 existing acts: A majority of these changes are administrative. Compared to the scandals and spending abuses currently rocking the Liberal government, this is not the time to be addressing a majority of these issues. We are facing serious economic crisis in this province because the Liberal government's economic agenda has failed, their famous five-point plan. We haven't heard too much about the five-point plan in the last little while, and that's probably a good thing, because the five-point plan was an unmitigated disaster which drove industry from this province, drove over 300,000 manufacturing jobs out of this province and left this province reeling as a have-not province in a Canada that sees new provinces across this country becoming “have” provinces. That is a sad day for the people of Ontario.

We are facing serious economic problems. Our unemployment rate is almost in double digits. We have been saddled with a \$24.7-billion deficit that will divert taxpayers' money from public programs to interest payments in years to come. A \$24.7-billion deficit, to put it in context, is almost double what the previous largest deficit was. It isn't just a few billion dollars—a few billion, if you can use that term—more than the largest deficit in the past; it is almost double the largest deficit in the past. The context of that is truly scary.

We are in a time when Ontario has become a have-not province under a government voted the worst provincial government in Canada. It is monstrous for the Liberals to have introduced this bill during a provincial crisis they have played a large part in creating.

I cannot help but wonder if this good-government bill isn't a scandal to cover up those previous scandals that we were talking about.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I know Mr. Chudleigh is doing a great job speaking, but I don't believe there's a quorum in here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Continue, member.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Monique just stepped in.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'm here.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oh, they snuck one under the wire there.

I want to touch on a few points within the 79 acts amended by schedule 2 of this scandalous bill. Remember that there are not only 79 acts that are amended; there are two completely new bills brought in under this legislation.

This schedule removes section 95 of the Ontario Municipal Board Act. It strips away the right of Ontarians to send a petition of appeal to the Lieutenant Governor in Council after a decision or an order of the OMB is made. It removes one more ability for people to control or have input into the things that occur in their neighbourhood or in their community. I think that certainly doesn't represent good government; that represents a more restrictive society, and I can't see how this government can think that would be a good thing. As the heavy hand of the Liberal government increasingly pounds down on the lives of Ontarians and on the independent decision-making of our municipalities, I have serious concern that this avenue is being abolished.

This schedule amends the Compensation for Victims of Crime Act. It does not speak to victims such as Patricia Marshall and her daughters, whose victim rights were infringed. It does not speak to the unacceptable statements used in the crown's letter to Mrs. Marshall explaining why he withdrew charges against a young man caught masturbating in her yard while peering through her windows. It does not speak to the contrasting reasons given by the crown and the assistant deputy Attorney General of the criminal law division to this victim explaining why the charges were withdrawn. It does not assure the Marshalls and the people of Ontario in similar circumstances that justice will be done. It does not force the Attorney General or this province to explain what he means by taking an issue "seriously" when he is doing absolutely nothing about it.

I'm somewhat concerned about the addition of section 10.1 in the Legislation Act. This new section will allow, through a report tabled by the Attorney General, all acts

that meet the specific requirements to be repealed. I understand the general purpose of this provision, but there are a number of unanswered questions. For example, I'm unclear as to how this report will look. There is no indication of what procedures will be used to vote on this report, including how this chamber will determine if a bill should be removed and therefore not repealed. I am concerned that the opposition will be unaware of the decision-making process used to decide which relevant bills are included in the first instance.

I think I should remind the government that bills are not the property of the government. Bills are the property of the people of Ontario, and removing them is a very serious business. If this government cannot find the time in this Legislature to bring those bills forward for some debate before they are removed, then I think Ontario has certainly lost some of its accountability and has lost some of its transparency—two issues that this bill purports to support and yet, in this instance, it has not supported at all. In 2010 and 2011, this new provision could provide the Liberals with opportunities to table a report and bury the opposition in another mountain of paper as further scandals come to light. This is not good government.

Schedule 2 is massive. It repeals bills and allows older bills to be repealed more easily. This is not simply housekeeping, this is not accountability, and this is certainly not good government.

Schedule 5 creates a new act, the Adjudicative Tribunals Accountability, Governance and Appointments Act. This is not housekeeping. It is a disgrace to have it included within the good-government bill, and it is the subject of a third party amendment to this bill, an amendment which I will be pleased to support when it comes to a vote. That vote should be many months from now as we continue to debate this bill in this House.

This schedule should not have been included as part of this bill. If the Liberals wanted to ensure good government and transparency, they would have introduced this new act as a separate public bill. Yet, with a twist of irony, the Liberals have included this new act as part of their Good Government Act. It boggles my mind why the Liberals chose these titles: the Good Government Act, the Adjudicative Tribunals Accountability, Governance and Appointments Act. Did they really believe that these titles would be nice enough for a nice photo op? Did they think that the scandals would not be revealed?

0940

This is not a Good Government Act or accountability. This is scandalous. It's a typical act of bad government because it's restricting people's abilities for accountability and transparency. And we get this from a government that has been voted the worst government in Canada. This new act has a nice name. It may divert people from its content. But I think people will dig a bit and realize that the act is supported on some pretty weak fluff.

First, what is the scope of this act? It tries to codify accountability, but for who and for what adjudicative

tribunals? Adjudicative tribunals are defined as “an agency, board, commission, corporation or other entity that is prescribed” in the massive government the Liberals have created. That’s all we know. I don’t know, Ontarians don’t know and even the media likely doesn’t know, unless it has been leaked to them, who this act will apply to. Why? Because the affected administrative tribunals will be laid out in regulation. When? We don’t know. All we can say for certain is that it doesn’t affect the unaccountable, bad government of the Liberals, the body that needs accountability and transparency more than anyone.

But it seems to get worse. Not only are we left in the dark about accountability but we don’t know which administrative tribunals the appointment process and this new act apply to. Again we have to wait for the regulations. We’re asked to vote on something which could be referred to as a pig in a poke. Again we have to wait for the regulations.

This is bad government in the name of good government, unaccountability in the name of accountability, and a scandal to cover up scandals.

If people aren’t convinced, they should look to see when this new act will take effect: not immediately. In fact, only when the government decides to proclaim the schedule will this new act come into force. When is that? We don’t know, but likely it will involve a nice photo op.

Why was this new bill introduced in a housekeeping bill? Why are we denied knowing how widely these accountability measures will be applied? If it is so important to introduce them in the middle of a provincial crisis, why is the government not ensuring this schedule has immediate effect? Why is the worst government in Canada imposing accountability on administrative tribunals when it is failing so miserably in this regard itself?

A second problem I have with this new bill, this new act, is the requirements being imposed on administrative tribunals. Accountability and good governance are principles that the PC caucus and I take seriously. It is why we have such a problem with this bill on so many levels. But in equal measure, we take the effective and efficient operation of government extremely seriously. We believe that a government acts on behalf of the people of Ontario and that every dollar it spends is not the government’s money, not Dalton McGuinty’s money but that of the taxpayers. That’s why we were so upset last spring when this Premier was at a photo op introducing the construction of a building in Toronto, I believe it was, when he spoke about the money that was coming from Ottawa and the money that was coming from McGuinty. It was as if he had put his hand in his pocket and taken out his own money to finance this project. I’ve noticed that he has changed his tune since then, but it was an indication of the attitude, the cavalier attitude, that this government has developed over their six years of governance of this province.

Let’s see what the Liberals believe is a good use of taxpayers’ dollars. Remember that this in the middle of an economic downturn, when the government’s mis-

management has saddled Ontarians with billions of dollars of scandals, tax grabs and an astronomical deficit. This bill will require administrative tribunals, whichever they are, to develop “public accountability documents” and “governance accountability documents.” If we dig a bit, we see that these include a mandate and mission statement, a consultation policy, a services standard policy, an ethics plan, a member accountability framework, a memorandum of understanding with the responsible ministers, a business plan and an annual report. This list does not even include what comes under regulation.

A \$24.7-billion deficit is becoming less and less surprising. This new bill is only one more example of how the Liberals like to sit around a table busying themselves on bureaucratic red tape as opposed to efficiently managing the economy of our province.

I would like to address two more concerns I have with this new act. The first comes with what the Liberals have termed “clustering.” In principle, I can see some efficiencies in this idea, but reading through this new act, I do not see how it is being applied. Again, we are left in the dark about what effect this clustering will have in reality. The act of clustering will be done in regulation.

I believe that this clustering that the government is doing could also lead to many abuses of accountability and transparency. It gives the government additional powers over the operation of inquiries so that they can be scoped, they can be focused, they can be restricted, their budgets can be restricted, and they can be moved in a way that suits the government, as opposed to the accountability, the transparency and the ultimate truth that public inquiries are meant to bring.

When a cluster is created, the new bill allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to appoint an executive chair, an associate chair, one or more vice-chairs for each tribunal in the cluster and one or more alternate executive chairs from among the associate chairs. My goodness, that’s a lot of Liberal appointments for one inquiry. Wow. My head spins when those figures come out, and I think of all the Liberals who are going to get those nice appointments. For the most part, we don’t know what the chairs will do. That’s in regulation as well. We know they may create an even larger bureaucracy. That has been the way of this government.

Another section controls the budget of the agencies, boards and commissions. Government controls structure, they control budget, they control mandate and they control the inquiry. They have significant control over the results of that inquiry as well—and that, my friends, is not good government.

My final concern, topping off all the others, is found in subsection 20(2) of the new act, which states: “Any failure of an adjudicative tribunal or its chair to comply with this act does not affect the validity of any action taken or decision made by the tribunal or the chair.” That gives everybody a pass. A basic tenet of British law that goes back to the Magna Carta of 1215 is that when there’s been an error made, the judgment of that court or tribunal is set aside, yet this bill will change all that. The

history of the British law system, the history of the Canadian system of law, the history of law in Ontario will be changed in that you can make any mistake you want during the inquiry, but it won't affect the outcome. I don't know how a government can say that that is accountable, that that is transparent or that it adds to the ability of a government to bring freedom and accountability to the people of Ontario. Just think about the ramifications that could happen during those inquiries.

With that, my friends, I've got to share my time. I'm going to turn it over to the member from Burlington, who I know is equally shocked. I'll look forward to a long and healthy debate on this particular bill as we move through the 600 different schedules. Many of them are housekeeping, but the fact that two complete bills have been included in this legislation makes it unacceptable on the very surface of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm happy to join my colleague the member from Halton to speak to Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts.

As the title implies, this bill, if passed, amends or repeals a number of acts and enacts new acts. I believe the bill actually makes about 600 changes in total—600 changes. The McGuinty Liberals say that this bill is part of the government initiative to promote good government. Well, I want to point out that just because they have dubbed the bill the good-government bill doesn't mean that it is.

I would hope that the McGuinty Liberals don't think they can pull the wool over our eyes or the eyes of Ontarians by referring to this bill as "good government." I know Ontarians are a whole lot smarter than that, and they will see right through what is trying to happen here with this bill. Clearly I do not agree with the title of the bill, and I would argue that it is a bad-government bill, not a good-government bill. It's simply bad politics in the name of good government.

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For starters, this bill was introduced in the Legislature last Tuesday. That's a week ago. However, it was not posted or made available to Ontarians until later Thursday afternoon. That's two days later. The first day of debate was then scheduled for yesterday, which left almost no time to prepare. That is really quite appalling, especially for a bill of this magnitude. I'm sure the intent was to overwhelm the opposition parties and Ontarians, and to push this bill through without giving us and the public proper time to review it, which I will say really does hinder the democratic process.

This government has had months to review this bill. They have had time to review it so that they fully understand it and have had time to consult with stakeholders about the implications of the bill. As my colleague has already mentioned, there was a great delay in getting this bill introduced. If this government wasn't prepared to provide copies of this bill and make it public

or get it up on the website for all the world to see, they should have delayed the introduction of the bill until they were prepared.

I would suspect that the answer has something to do with the McGuinty Liberals wanting to attract attention away from the long list of Liberal scandals and the record-breaking \$24.7 billion in debt that was announced just a couple of weeks ago. I will elaborate on these points a little bit later.

I want to first talk about the democratic process that is supposed to be in place in this House and how discouraged I am that it isn't. It would seem that the media had an inside scoop on this bill before opposition MPPs even knew about it. A case in point: On Wednesday morning, we were privileged enough to read about some of the implications that this bill would have through the press. I tried to pull up the bill on the website, and as I already mentioned, it was nowhere to be found.

I guess I really shouldn't be surprised at this, coming from this government. There seems to be a trend here. Earlier this month, we learned about the findings of the Auditor General's report regarding this government's electronic health records system through the media—and days before the actual report was released. I'm sure this was quite disappointing to the Auditor General himself. I will say that as a courtesy, the Auditor General provides a copy of his report first to the minister and the ministry. In this case, it was the Ministry of Health and it was in advance of the report being released. This does, of course, come with strict instructions that the report not be decimated in any way or copied. This government should have more respect for these sorts of rules and for the people of Ontario, but instead, they seem to have this culture of entitlement and they often deviate from the rules.

Another example is the 2009 budget. There, we learned about what was in the budget days before it was actually tabled. The Premier himself deliberately breached the convention of budget secrecy when he announced the amount the government was promising to spend on infrastructure over the next two years prior to the budget being tabled. I greatly respect the traditions of this Legislature and the democratic process that should be taking place each and every day here in this House. I would hope that this government learns to respect that as well.

As I already mentioned, I am quite sure the intent of this bill was not housekeeping at all, as the McGuinty Liberals have indicated. It is to deviate from the long laundry list of Liberal scandals. It seems quite suspicious to me that this 322-page bill was dumped on us as this government tried to dodge the scandals that they have been plagued with. The McGuinty Liberals needed to provide a distraction from all the opposition research that was being done to expose this government's continued long list of scandals. The fact that a majority of this government's agencies are not even subject to freedom-of-information requests wasn't doing the trick anymore; they needed another tactic, so they introduced this

massive bill. I guess the hope here was that the McGuinty Liberals could buy themselves a little time in which to perhaps avoid a new scandal that might be revealed. As we all know, for weeks now, each time we pick up the morning paper, turn on the news or listen to the radio, there's a new link to a Liberal scandal. The hope of this bill is to serve as a distraction to try to prevent all of that. However, there is no bill large enough to cover up this government's secrets.

It is no coincidence that a couple of weeks after the PC caucus called for a public inquiry to resolve the many unanswered questions that remain about the serious abuse and misuse of taxpayers' money that occurred within the McGuinty Liberal eHealth scandal, this government dumps a massive 322-page bill. The Premier has refused a public inquiry. The Liberals voted down our opposition day motion requesting a public inquiry and the Liberal-majority-held public accounts committee voted down bringing the former eHealth Ontario CEO, Sarah Kramer, and former board chair Alan Hudson before the committee to be questioned. They blocked off all roads to answers that Ontarians are asking for and deserve to know.

Haven't the McGuinty Liberals learned that you cannot just make your problems go away by covering them up? They should, because this tactic has backfired on them before. Let me refresh their memory: Over the spring and summer of 2008, the PC caucus held this government to account on their neglect of the very serious C. difficile issue. This government knew about the severity of C. difficile dating back to 2003, when a serious outbreak killed over 20 patients. The ministry did a study—they actually did a study—into those deaths in 2004, yet this government did nothing. And as everyone remembers, hundreds of people lost their lives and got sick. Finally, on May 28, 2008, former health and long-term-care minister George Smitherman announced that mandatory reporting of C. difficile cases in hospitals would begin on September 30 of that year.

Fast-forward a few months. David Caplan takes over as Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and moves that date from September 30 to September 26. Well, guess what? September 26 is a Friday, a day when the Legislature does not sit for question period, so the opposition cannot immediately hold the government to account here in the House; a day when the ministers don't walk out of the Legislature to stand in front of the media to answer the questions the media have; and a day when Ontarians are preoccupied with the upcoming events of the weekend. Aside from Friday, September 26, being the beginning of the mandatory reporting for C. difficile, it was also the same day that the government dissolved the Smart Systems for Health Agency and replaced it with eHealth Ontario. Now, here's the irony: This is a so-called good-government bill that's been introduced to cover up the disastrous scandal that ended up occurring at eHealth.

Another example is the release of the Cancer Care Ontario audit—this is shameful. The audit was quietly released the same day as the auditor's report on

electronic health records systems. The audit found that the agency had spent nearly \$75 million on consultants over the last two years and did not consistently apply tendering rules for all of the contracts. The audit also found that one consulting firm received single-source contracts worth \$18.7 million over a three-year period. None of these expenses billed by consultants were pre-approved by the agency, and almost all of them weren't backed up by receipts. So again we see the McGuinty Liberals follow this trend by releasing the Cancer Care Ontario audit on a day when MPPs, the media and Ontarians were preoccupied with the Auditor General's report.

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I would like to make one more point regarding this bad-government bill. I think there are really some significant changes in this bill, and the fact that they have been thrown into a 322-page document raises some very big red flags.

What is in this bill that the McGuinty Liberals are hoping we won't find? Why are the large parts of this bill not stand-alone bills? My colleague has already spoken about the proposal to replace the Public Inquiries Act. Well, I think this is really interesting timing, since the PC caucus has called on the Premier to call a public inquiry into the eHealth scandal. I won't pursue this today, but I can only wonder whether this is one of the changes the McGuinty Liberals were hoping to hide in these 322 pages of changes.

Regrettably, I again have to say that this is not the first time that we have seen this government play the game of "find the needle in the haystack." They dumped binders full of OLG expenses on us; they dumped thousands of pages of Ministry of Health FOIs on us; and perhaps the most notable, they dumped six binders of information regarding the freedom-of-information request from eHealth Ontario. I would just like to remind the McGuinty Liberals that we went through those six binders. We went through them page for page, and I am sure that every member on the opposite side of this House knows what the result of that was. This bill will be no different. We will go through this bill page for page and pull out what the McGuinty Liberals hope to hide.

Let's talk about what this bill does.

The bill makes some significant changes to the Municipal Elections Act. One change that would affect almost everyone is the change to section 5, which amends the voting day from the second Monday in November to the fourth Monday in October. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has said that a number of seniors' groups, as well as female candidates, have asked for this change, and I can appreciate that. I think that a lot of people, particularly snowbirds leaving us as of November 1, wanted to have this date moved forward. This will allow more Ontarians the ability to vote.

I have spoken about the democratic process already, but I will just add that voting is certainly part of that democratic process. So if we can encourage a greater voter turnout, that is something I will strongly support.

The change in the election date, of course, changes the deadline for a candidate to file their nomination papers.

As I see it, this bill would also amend the cut-off date for nomination papers. It would move the time from 4 p.m. to 2 p.m. on the second Friday in September. Two o'clock seems a little odd to me; I don't know why they picked 2 o'clock. I wonder why it's not still 4 o'clock, which is closer to the end of the day and easier for most people to come in and file.

This bill also addresses the needs of candidates and electors with disabilities, another good thing in this bill. The bill includes a change that states, "Campaign expenses related to a candidate's disability are excluded from the candidate's spending limit." So if a candidate needs a ramp built to their new campaign office, that can be done without actually charging it to the campaign expenses.

I'm happy to see the progress that we have made as a society over the years as to the accessibility issues, and I think this is a positive change.

This bill would also allow the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., MPAC, to enter into an agreement with the Registrar General to broaden the range of information available to MPAC to create a preliminary list of electors. As you know, the Registrar General is responsible for the province's birth certificates, birth registrations, marriage certificates and name changes, as well as death certificates. This could prove to be helpful with respect to getting a more accurate voters' list. I think we have all heard about outdated information on voters' lists, and we all know it can be quite the nightmare. I just want to ensure that all the appropriate steps are taken to ensure that there are no privacy breaches here, and that we are mindful of the confidentiality of this personal information.

The accuracy of the voters' list was of concern to me, and I did take the time to address that in my 15 hours at the estimates committee with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Specifically, I asked the minister a question regarding the MPAC enumeration process. In 2006, as you may remember, the enumeration process included a new code, and the new code was simply the letter "U." It was to determine citizenship status. It created some concern in municipalities because many voters were classified with that "U," which represented unconfirmed citizenship. This meant that those voters had to then fill out an amendment form so that their citizenship would be known and proof would be given, which is very important. I don't disagree with that, but you can imagine the real problem at the polls when something like this occurs. Many, many backups happened. There were huge lineups in some municipalities.

MPAC has indicated that they're working on this, and they hope to improve the accuracy of this enumeration process. My question to the minister was to provide some insight into the status of this and whether municipalities could look forward to a less cumbersome process for the 2010 municipal election. Actually, if I remember correctly, the minister pointed out that it was a very good question. In his response, the minister told me that he undertook this issue with the Minister of Finance, as MPAC falls under the Minister of Finance's portfolio,

and that, if they were to make changes to the Municipal Act, it would be one of the areas that would be addressed.

But you know what? I see in this bill that MPAC is given the ability to use data from the Registrar General regarding the registration of births, deaths and changes of name, but I don't think that it will address the unconfirmed citizenship status issue. As far as I can see, this issue has not been addressed in this bill. And because of how quickly this bill has been thrown at us, I must say that I have not had the opportunity to take part in my technical briefing yet from the staff of the ministry. I am, though, looking forward to that later this week, and I will be asking that very specific question of the staff.

Another point that I want to make is with respect to the environment and land use planning cluster. I also addressed this in my 15 hours with the minister at the estimates committee. The cluster will combine the Assessment Review Board, the board of negotiation, the Environmental Review Tribunal and also the municipal board. Although these tribunals affect municipalities directly, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would not respond to my questions and suggested that they be asked of the Attorney General. I see that the minister will not be speaking on this issue, on this so-called good-government bill, so again, he will be off the hook with respect to questions regarding this new cluster and the implications that it has for the municipal sector.

I'd also like to point out that the initial report that resulted in the proposal for the environment and land use planning cluster was prepared for the Minister of Government Services, even though the tribunals fall under the jurisdiction of the Attorney General. So I don't really buy this whole thing of the "not my issue" response, and I will certainly be looking for further answers regarding the cluster when I speak with the ministry staff.

I want to touch on what I think has been missed in this bill. I think that since this bill opens up the Municipal Elections Act, there is an opportunity to talk about some other changes, changes that have been talked about over the last couple of years but have not been presented in this bill.

I would like to talk about voting locations. In the last general election, and even in my by-election in 2007, I received many e-mails and phone calls from concerned parents regarding their children's schools being used as voting locations. I understand the logistics of using a school as a voting location because they're really the centre point of a community. They also have facilities to allow for voting stations to be set up mainly in the school auditorium so it facilitates people coming in and going out. However, most recently, we have worried about the safety of our schools, and I think that schools have most doors locked, and strangers and visitors must check in with the office and that kind of procedure.

So I can appreciate the concern of parents that outsiders, even though they may be going through their democratic process of voting, are really outsiders to that school, and they're coming into their children's school while their children are there. I think that school security has really increased over the last years, and we have all

heard some disturbing stories. We really need to ensure that we do everything in our power to protect the safety of our children.

It is for this reason that I'm suggesting that we try to coordinate a professional development day occurring on the same day as the municipal election. This would allow for municipalities to use the school as a voting location, and it would also put the many concerned parents at ease that their children are not put in any potentially dangerous situations. This bill allows for the opportunity for us to look at this now, because we're opening the act. The Attorney General should work with the Minister of Education on this front and arrange that a PD day be coordinated with the municipal election. I know that as an opposition member, our recommendations are most usually not considered, let alone taken, but I feel that this one has very strong merit. I will, of course, be suggesting this as an amendment to this bill, and I guess I will just have to wait and see how it is perceived by the Liberal majority.

I will wrap up my time today by reiterating a comment I made earlier. This bill is truly bad politics in the name of good government. It has the potential to be a political diversion for the long list of Liberal scandals. It has diminished our democratic process by not providing all members of the Legislature with the bill in a timely way, by rushing a bill of this magnitude to debate before the hard copies have even arrived at our desks, and by leaking parts of this bill before members had a chance to even look at it. This is certainly my definition of bad government, not good government.

We have already seen far too much money and time wasted on the McGuinty Liberals' photo ops. There is absolutely no more room for any waste, especially now with their record-breaking \$24.7-billion debt. If the McGuinty Liberals are truly to their word on this being a good-government bill, they will act in that way and they will accept the recommendations from the opposition parties for amendments—from my colleagues as well as myself—because that is what good government does. As members of official opposition, it is our role to critique the actions of this government and present suggestions that will benefit all Ontarians. It is also the current government's role to adopt some of these suggestions of changes that may previously have not been considered.

On that note, I look forward to the continued debates on this bill, and I look forward to following this bill to committee.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30. When debate continues, we will begin with questions and comments.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased this morning to rise and introduce a couple of the truck drivers in Ontario

who are under stress from the lack of action by the government: Gus Rahim, who's the president of the Truck Training Schools Association of Ontario, Rich Lupiccini and Rob Coleshaw, who join us here in the visitors' gallery today.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my honour to introduce the family of page Hannah Walters-Vida: her mother, Heather Walters; her father, Ron Vida; and her sister Sophie Walters-Vida. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I welcome to the Legislature today Dale Petrie, the general manager of the Ontario Soybean Growers, and Barry Senft, the CEO of the new Grain Farmers of Ontario. I know that they certainly will welcome you this evening to committee room 2 at 5 p.m. for the Ontario Soybean Growers' reception. So welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'm really delighted to introduce to you the grade 10 students from one of the best schools in the city of Toronto, Oakwood Collegiate. They're here with three teachers: Jeff Jones, David Adam and Gaynor Priestley. I say, welcome.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's also my honour to introduce my new daughter-in-law, Karen Lao Quintero, who has just emigrated to Canada from Cuba. Welcome, Karen.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Today, Madeline Thomson, the daughter of a very good friend of mine, Paul Thomson, will be visiting the Legislature. Madeline is with her grade 5 class from Charles Beaudoin school in Burlington. I understand they'll be doing a tour and exploring the historic legislative precinct, including an encounter, perhaps, with you later, Mr. Speaker. So we'd like to welcome them today to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Minister of Health. Let me say that I am pleased to hear that the McGuinty government is listening to some of the advice that my health critic, Christine Elliott, and the PC caucus have brought forward. I encouraged you to open up workplace and school clinics and also to recruit retired nurses and doctors to make sure we get more shots in arms immediately.

A question to the Minister: How is it that the government can say how many inmates in our prisons have been inoculated, but you're not aware of the number of high-priority Ontario residents that have received the shot?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition recognizes that we're working very hard to get the vaccination out and into Ontarians as quickly as we possibly can. Our goal—our target—is to get the 2.2 million doses that we currently have into people by the end of Saturday. Our public health units across the province are working very, very hard to accomplish that goal. The vaccine does nothing for

people when it's in the fridge. We need to get it into people as quickly as we can, and we are committed to doing that. We have hundreds of thousands of people by the day, and by Saturday, it will be, I hope, 2.2 million.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: That's precisely why the PC caucus recommended clinics opening 24 hours a day, and workplace and school clinics, because it does no good when the vaccines are sitting on shelves in refrigerators. We hope the government immediately puts that advice into effect.

According to government records, some 70 convicted prisoners have been given the H1N1 shot. However, no guards were, not even Anita Mastracci, a prison guard who is seven months' pregnant. Eddy Almeida, chair of the corrections division, said the government told them it deferred to public health on who should receive the vaccine. He told us this was "a break from practice," and based on past practice, officers were assuming they would get the H1N1 flu shot as well.

Does the minister think it's appropriate that inmates are getting the shot but prison guards like Ms. Mastracci are not?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me make it very clear that pregnant women are in the highest priority group. I urge all pregnant women to get that vaccine. The unadjuvanted vaccine has now arrived in Ontario and is on its way out to the public health units. All pregnant women should receive the vaccine as quickly as possible. As I say, we have a new supply of 86,000 doses of the unadjuvanted vaccine that is specifically for pregnant women. I urge all pregnant women to get that vaccination either in a clinic or from their doctor. Many doctors will be having the unadjuvanted vaccine as well. Pregnant women should be receiving that vaccine. It protects not just them; it also protects their unborn child.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here is the problem: While prisoners are getting their H1N1 vaccine—as I've said, a number already did as of Monday—pregnant women, young children and vulnerable people are still lining up at clinics across the province. It's very sad that somebody like Anita Mastracci, a seven-months-pregnant prison guard, is forced to line up behind the prisoners before she will get her shot at one of the clinics across the province. I hope the minister will correct that immediately.

The minister says that the reason prisoners are getting the H1N1 flu vaccine is because you're only following medical and public health officials' directions. But we understand that yesterday, Ron McKerlie, the Deputy Minister of Government Services, arbitrarily cancelled the prisoner vaccination plan. Why are you saying you're following the advice of health officials when it's clearly not the case?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are following the advice of the experts. I think that is actually what your critic has advised us to do.

High-risk people are receiving the vaccination. That includes people who are in our prisons. If the Leader of the Opposition is recommending that we withhold vaccine from people in our prisons, if he would prefer to see those people in our hospitals, then I think he should stand up and say that.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Minister of Health: The problem that Ontario families have when they see this growing fiasco at the vaccination clinics is that sometimes the government says it takes the medical officer of health's advice and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes they say they follow their plan, except when they don't follow their plan.

While we know how many doses of H1N1 vaccine were given to inmates, the minister has yet to tell the general public how many people in the general population have received the vaccine to date. Minister, chapter 9, page 1 of your own Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic says the government should have "a mechanism in place to monitor antiviral and vaccine uptake and effectiveness." Why haven't you followed the Ontario influenza pandemic plan that you yourself commissioned?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I don't think there's anyone here who is going to defend what we saw last week, when clearly the demand for vaccine far outstripped our capacity to deliver it in some parts of the province. I should say that Niagara region, however, delivered the vaccine very smoothly. We learned from that. There are lineups that are very, very short. There are clinics where there are no lineups at all. Over 2,000 places across this province are now delivering the vaccine.

Again, I urge people who are in those high-priority groups to get their vaccine as quickly as possible. There is still vaccine available, although I must say we do expect, as we accelerate the distribution of the vaccine, that we will start to see empty fridges this week. We are hoping that the federal—

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

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: That's exactly the concern: We are now almost a week into this and we're still seeing fridges packed with H1N1 vaccine when clinics close their doors. We're still seeing lineups of pregnant women and young children while vaccine is sitting on the shelves. I certainly am pleased with the progress in the Niagara area and commend all the health care workers and Dr. Robin Williams.

The minister makes an important point for us: You have a wide variety of approaches that are happening in every corner of the province. Minister, I cannot believe that in a city the size of Toronto, there was not one single clinic open this past Sunday, a very convenient day for families to take their kids to get the shot. Will the

minister direct public health units where needed to have clinics open this Sunday to help Ontario families?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are getting updates from public health units. What I can tell you is that we have hundreds of thousands of people now vaccinated and that our target is 2.2 million people vaccinated by the end of the day on Saturday.

Let me tell you, as of November 3—that's today—in Guelph, 2,300 have received vaccinations; in Niagara, 45,000 have received vaccinations; in Cornwall, in eastern Ontario, 20,000 people; in North Bay and Parry Sound, 20,000—and they are expecting to run out very soon; in Ottawa, 80,000 people; in Hamilton, 20,000 people; in Sudbury, 18,000 people; in Toronto, 100,000 people; in Peterborough, 10,000 people; in Brantford, 7,000 people—and the list goes on.

We are working as hard as we can, as are health care workers across the province, to respond to this pandemic, to get the vaccine that we have into Ontarians—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister makes my point for me: While there has been progress in Niagara, other areas like Hamilton and Toronto are far behind, and we continue to get concerns from pregnant women and moms who can't get their kids into lineups.

We've brought forward a number of suggestions, Minister, that I understand the McGuinty government is now thinking about implementing. Now is your chance for those areas that have fallen far behind. Will you give direction to the public health units where needed to open up clinics on Sundays, to open up clinics around the clock and to put workplace and school vaccination clinics into play to help families get the shots, where they need them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: With the greatest respect, I do suggest that the Leader of the Opposition learn what's happening on the ground today. We have learned from what has happened. The clinics are working as quickly as is possible.

As I say, we expect to be out of vaccine by the end of the week. To move to a 24/7 clinic cycle, to respond to political partisanship, I think would be irresponsible. We will continue to work as hard as we possibly can to get that vaccine to people. It's our responsibility.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Thanks to the efforts of Ontarians and hard-working health care professionals, H1N1 vaccination lines have finally subsided somewhat, as of yesterday. But people are still trying to decide whether this government actually has a coordinated plan. To cite one example, pregnant women in Peel have been told they are not a high priority even though they are in the rest of the province. Why are expectant mothers in Peel different from women everywhere else in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. This is the first that we learned of this particular

circumstance. We and our public health officials haven't been anything but unanimous when it comes to who are to be found in the highest-priority groups and who are those who are most at risk, including pregnant moms.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the public health officials in Peel and everywhere across the province for the heroic efforts that they have been making to adopt best practices as quickly as they can. I think if you turn on your TV this afternoon and this evening, you will see that those long lineups have all but disappeared. There are 2,000 places now that are giving out the vaccination. We have doubled the number of public health clinics. We have made some real progress.

I want to thank Ontarians for their patience and understanding in allowing those in the high-priority groups to get in line first.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families want to be reassured that this government has a coordinated plan, but their confidence continues to wane. In some parts of Ontario, vaccinations are happening quickly and efficiently, but in other communities, parents are waiting or buying their way to the front of the line at private clinics.

This government has had months and months to plan. How does the Premier explain the woeful lack of coordination in the rollout of this vaccination?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to assure Ontarians that public health officials and units right across the province are making real progress. They have learned from some of the shortcomings that were manifest last week. There are in fact many more clinics open. They are open for extended hours. I've just received a note here that's saying that when it comes to Peel, they are running clinics from 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. from Monday to Friday, and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

So I think what's important to understand—my colleagues opposite continue to look in the rearview mirror. What I would encourage them to do is to develop a better understanding of what is happening on the ground today. There are now many more sites that are providing vaccinations, including the doubling of our public health clinics.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Parents, expectant mothers and hundreds of others with delicate health conditions simply want to do the right thing to protect themselves and their families, but their government has fallen short. Over the coming weeks, millions more vaccinations will be delivered. How can Ontario families be assured that this government has a coordinated plan to handle this well?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, what I can say is that we have, working together, made some tremendous progress. I think that's evident in how the vaccination is now being delivered in Ontario. We have doubled the number of public health clinics. There are now at least 2,000 sites, and that's probably a number that is growing

in terms of places where people can obtain the vaccine: family health teams; community health centres; hospitals, certainly, for our health care deliverers; and the public health units. We've doubled that number from 50 to 100 right across the province. So we expect that we will continue to find ways to make more progress.

I'll say two things to Ontarians in particular: One, thank you so much for your patience; for allowing those people in the priority groups to get in the front of the line. They are most at risk, and we owe it to them to ensure that they get their vaccination first.

Secondly, I would say to the broader population: Continue to wash your hands. Continue to cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Stay home if you're sick. In the end we are still going to ask, we're going to plead with you and urge you to avail yourself of the vaccination opportunity. We want as many Ontarians as possible to get their vaccination.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is to the Premier. The Minister of Health said that the government wants to administer 2.2 million doses of the vaccine by the end of the week, but yesterday she couldn't say exactly how many people had already had their shot. So how can the Premier know if the government is actually on target if he doesn't know how many vaccinations have actually been administered?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps I'll repeat: We are on track to deliver our target, which is 2.2 million doses to the people of Ontario, by the end of Saturday. We are getting updates from public health units. They are very busy delivering the vaccine. That is their number one job, but let me share some numbers that we do have.

In Guelph, 2,300 people have received the vaccine; in the Niagara area, 45,000 people have received the vaccine; in Cornwall and eastern Ontario, 20,000 people; in North Bay and Parry Sound, 20,000 people; in Ottawa, 80,000 people have received the vaccine; in Hamilton, 20,000 people; in Sudbury, 18,000 people; in Toronto, 100,000 people; in Peterborough—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm trying to do the math as the minister brings the numbers forward, and the simple math suggests that hitting the target is going to be extremely difficult. There are 100 clinics operating, and each clinic can vaccinate 2,000 people a day. The best-case scenario is 200,000 vaccinations a day. If the government is to reach 2.2 million, the target that they're talking about, they would have to have already vaccinated one million people. Is that the case?

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to help the leader of the third party with her math a little bit. People are getting the vaccine in clinics; that is correct. We also have over 2,000 other locations where people are getting the vaccine. Our public health officials assure us that it's

an aggressive target but it is an achievable target. So we are on track to deliver 2.2 million doses of the vaccine by the end of the day Saturday.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Instead of teaching me math this minister should learn how to roll out a vaccination program that has the confidence of the people of Ontario. That's what she should be focusing on. You know what? Families just want to be assured that this government has a coordinated plan, but their confidence continues to wane. First, a complete lack of communication—a complete communication breakdown; now, Ontarians see a government that says it's on target, but they can't actually say exactly how many people have been vaccinated.

Over the coming weeks, millions more vaccines are going to be delivered. How can Ontario families be assured that their government has a coordinated plan to handle the swell?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I actually need to say that I don't think the leader of the third party or anyone in this House should be running down our public health workers at this time in a pandemic. Our public health workers across the province are working day and night to get vaccines into people. These people are working very, very hard—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Start the clock. The clock had been stopped, but there were interjections from the opposition side.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have every confidence that our public health units will deliver the vaccine in a way that respects people. They have learned from the problems that did exist in the first week and they have revised their plans. They've expanded the number of clinics; they've expanded the number of places where people can get it. We are dealing with a shortage of vaccines in coming—

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

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, more people are going to get H1N1 as a result of your government's failure to distribute and administer the vaccine effectively.

Let's look to the line of next defence. Minister, is the ministry ready with a steady and sufficient supply of antivirals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I confess that I had a little bit of trouble hearing the question, so let me speak to our preparedness to respond to what we know will be an

increased number of people who will be ill with H1N1. We are seeing more people in the hospital, but I have to say that the vast majority of people who are admitted to hospital are subsequently released. There are approximately 82 people who are in the hospital as of yesterday; the vast majority of them are doing just fine.

We do have probably the world's best pandemic plan in place. Our hospitals are ready for the surge of people that we expect. I will be happy to answer more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Chapter 9.2 of the influenza pandemic plan says, "To be effective, antiviral treatment must be started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms." The plan calls for an effective distribution system for antivirals, but the lead stories on all the news-casts throughout the day indicate that there is not an effective system in place for distributing the vaccine. You haven't followed the influenza pandemic plan up till now. Will you start following it and ensure that the province is ready for the increased supply of antiviral medication that we know we're going to need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have an ample supply of Tamiflu. It has been distributed to pharmacies across the province. We have enough Tamiflu for 25% of our whole population. That is by any means considered an ample supply of Tamiflu.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. I, like most people, recognize that electronic health records are vitally important. We have to succeed, but not at all costs. It has to be transparent; we have to be accountable. In the midst of the investigation by the Auditor General, eHealth brokered a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar, behind-closed-doors deal with the OMA, a secret \$236-million deal that only came to light as a result of Nightingale announcing to its shareholders that it is well positioned to benefit.

Premier, why wasn't the public made aware of this deal, and who approved it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In fact, this news appeared in the auditor's report on page 32. He has a special section entitled "Electronic Medical Record Systems." Specifically, on page 32:

"In 2005, in partnership with the Ontario Medical Association, it provided funding"—that is, the ministry—"to enable an estimated 30% of Ontario's primary-care physicians, or 3,300 of them, to acquire EMR systems." He goes on to say, "More than 1,700 additional primary care physicians had applied for funding.... The board of the eHealth Ontario agency recently approved another \$100 million in EMR support.... The eHealth strategic plan targets a 65% EMR adoption rate"—that is, electronic medical record adoption—"by primary care physicians by April 2012...."

He goes on to total all this up to at least \$225 million. It's all here, in black and white, in the auditor's report.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Let's get our facts straight. The Auditor General documented \$1 billion spent on eHealth, with little to show for it. In the midst of the investigation, \$236 million goes out the door. To me, \$236 million is a huge amount of money—it is bigger than a lot of the ministries sitting on the other side—and that, to benefit 5,700 physicians. If you do the math and say they're allowed \$30,000 each, that makes \$171 million. I'm interested in finding out who gets the other \$65 million from that deal.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What I can say is that so far we have 3,300 Ontario doctors who are using electronic medical records, which are covering four million Ontarians. With this new \$236-million investment, we want to have another 5,700 family physicians using electronic medical records, covering another six million Ontarians, for a total of 10 million Ontarians who will then be covered by our electronic medical record system. We think that's exactly what Ontarians want us to keep doing, which is making progress when it comes to laying the foundation for our electronic health record system.

RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know from experience with the health care issues in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex that there are many challenges unique to rural communities that need to be addressed, so I was very pleased to hear about the formation of the rural and northern health care panel earlier this year.

There are serious concerns being expressed about the process the panel is following and the lack of consultation to date. Hearing from Ontarians about health care issues and services in their communities is very important, and I know my constituents expect to have a voice. Could the minister please address the concerns of my constituents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can say that this is a very important issue to many Ontarians and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it.

Ontarians should have access to high-quality health care no matter where they live in the province. That's why we created the rural and northern panel to examine the unique challenges that these communities face. We will be consulting with Ontarians. This plan is about improving health care services in their communities. Their voices are crucially important to this.

1100

The panel is now in its first stage. The first stage is developing the rural and northern health care framework. Part of their work includes engaging Ontarians on five specific questions, through the website. Their report will then form the base for discussion at broader community consultations—the second phase of our approach—and inform the development of our provincial framework, which is the third and final stage of their work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm very glad that I'll be able to reassure my constituents that they play a real role in shaping how we will improve the health care of our rural communities.

One of the greatest concerns for people in rural communities is the sustainability of their local health care facilities, especially our rural hospitals and emergency rooms. Hospitals are important to communities, and constituents in my riding are understandably anxious about changes occurring at their hospital. Could the minister please confirm that the panel will be looking at the sustainability of hospitals and emergency rooms as part of the larger picture of local health care in rural communities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I agree that hospitals and health care facilities are important to communities, and that is never more true than in rural communities, and certainly we hear that from our rural caucus members on a regular basis.

The terms of reference for the panel recognize the challenges, and I would like to quote from that: "The challenges facing rural and northern communities across Ontario are long-standing, difficult and complex. Health care facilities serve multiple roles relative to those in urban centres and are farther apart, with significant travel distances between locations."

I can tell you that the panel will be recommending guidelines for LHINs, to be used when considering changing roles for health facilities.

I very much look forward to the report from the panel, consulting with Ontarians in rural and northern communities, and moving forward on a framework to improve health care services in our rural and northern communities.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is to the Premier. On the very same day the McGuinty Liberals blocked Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson from giving evidence about the untendered-contract spending spree at eHealth, the assistant deputy minister of health, John McKinley, told the public accounts committee it was he who blocked the auditor's investigation of the ministry. No public servant would put a career on the line for nothing. The question is this: Was John McKinley assigned to the program area specifically to block the auditor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Clearly, the auditor pointed out that he did not receive the compliance, which had, until that point in time, completely characterized our dealing with the auditor on any number of files.

The deputy minister has had an opportunity to speak to this, the secretary of cabinet has had an opportunity to speak to this, and I have certainly done so as well. We want to make it clear to all of our civil servants, all of our ministers and everybody inside the government that our responsibility, and in the public interest, is to comply

with any request coming from the auditor, and we intend to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Premier's answer clearly underlines the reason why we need a public inquiry.

Mr. McKinley told the public accounts committee he was trying to have the scope of the audit broadened before letting in the auditor, but he had only been recently promoted to the program area and had very little personal stake in the outcome of the audit. It defies common sense for a public servant who was just appointed to the program area to take a personal interest in whether the audit was narrow or broad or if the audit made the minister look better or worse. What on earth would John McKinley have had to gain by obstructing the auditor's investigation of the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is seeing ghosts.

This is a pretty straightforward matter. I think we should take Mr. McKinley at his word.

What has become obvious, as well, is that as soon as the matter was brought to the attention of the deputy minister, there was a phone call between the deputy minister and the auditor to clear the matter up immediately and assure the auditor of 100% compliance and support for his work. That's what happened. It was unfortunate that, for the first time ever in the history of our government when it comes to our dealings of the auditor, there was this unfortunate slip. I want to assure the auditor and Ontarians that it will not happen again.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the McGuinty government caved to the powerful insurance lobby by announcing deep cuts to basic benefits for auto accident victims. Mandatory rehabilitation and medical benefits for serious injuries will be slashed from \$100,000 to \$50,000. Second doctors' opinions will no longer be allowed. As a result, the auto insurance industry will save hundreds of millions of dollars in claims costs while individuals will be left unprotected and vulnerable.

Why is this government putting the interests of powerful insurance companies ahead of the interests of ordinary Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am confident that we have achieved the right balance here. My colleague believes that we should have public auto insurance. He would have the government create a brand new bureaucracy that would have to employ thousands of people to somehow act as a substitute for the private sector model.

We think we've struck the right balance. What we want to do is ensure that Ontarians have greater choice when it comes to the kinds of insurance that they might want to purchase for themselves. We've tried to strike a balance between affordability and coverage. Even the most modest package that will be required in law in the province of Ontario will be in keeping with the best com-

pensation packages and coverages that are available in other Canadian provinces. So we think we've struck that balance to help drivers, frankly, better manage their costs associated with auto insurance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: These changes of which the Premier speaks will force accident victims to turn to rehabilitation and medical treatment in the public health care system. There, they will find that the chiropractic and physiotherapy services have been delisted and that wait lists are so long that timely intervention becomes almost impossible. Victims will be forced to pay out of their own pockets for private care and will end up in debt. These changes will hurt Ontarians and help insurance companies.

Why won't this government put people first?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I assume that "putting people first" is code for public auto insurance. The NDP government in the province of Ontario rejected that—fortunately—for the right reasons. We reject it as well.

With respect to premium increases under the NDP government, it is worth reminding ourselves that they went up 20% in just two years. On our watch, after six years, we are still down about 2% on average. We understand that pressures are growing when it comes to costs in the insurance industry. That's why we brought in a package which I again believe strikes the right balance between consumer choice and affordability. Again, the minimum available package in the province of Ontario is on par with the very best right across the country.

TAXATION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Two weeks ago, I attended a meeting put together by the Brampton Board of Trade. The groups of businesses at the meeting were made up from various sectors and were all different sizes. There were some businesses at the meeting who had questions about how the HST was going to be implemented. Many businesses are aware of the benefits that harmonization will have for them.

My question is: What will the HST mean for businesses in my riding and across the province?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question and particularly for the warm reception that she and I both received at the Brampton Board of Trade.

Brampton and Mississauga South have one of the highest concentrations of manufacturers in the province of Ontario. Under our tax reform package, manufacturers will be receiving some \$1 billion worth of tax savings each and every year. Why? Because we need our manufacturers, our advanced manufacturers, to be even more competitive in the global economy.

As I criss-cross Ontario, I can tell you that people understand that the economy we had before this recession is different than the economy we're going to have after the recession. They understand that their government has

to make a bold move to ensure that we are increasingly competitive.

1110

On this side of the House, we are for reducing income taxes for people and businesses so that we are more competitive. We on this side of the House believe that there's a brighter future for our economy if we will just have the political courage to take this necessary step and have—

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm glad to hear about the measures being taken to educate businesses about the HST. However, some of the businesses, like Purolator, in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South want to get prepared for the transition by clarifying any questions now. Over the next couple of days, I know the Ontario Chamber of Commerce is hosting the Ontario Economic Summit at Niagara-on-the-Lake. I'm sure many of the businesses there will have similar concerns.

My question is: What are you doing to reach out to the businesses which have specific, technical, HST-related concerns?

Hon. John Wilkinson: We recently released, in conjunction with the federal government and the government of British Columbia, the transitional rules that will apply in the year 2010, a year of transition, when we go from having two sales taxes collected by two governments in this province to just one sales tax collected by one government.

I have had an opportunity to travel across Ontario, as have my colleagues, talking about the benefits, but there are specific questions that businesses have, and there are a number of opportunities. I can refer all businesses to a website called ontario.ca/taxchange. All of the latest information is there.

Working in conjunction, my ministry, the Ministry of Revenue, and the Canada Revenue Agency of the federal government will be holding joint seminars right across Ontario where we answer those detailed questions for businesses. It is important for businesses to understand that changes are coming, and it's important for them so that they can be competitive in the 21st century—

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

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Labour: The strike at Ontario's DriveTest centres is now in its 11th week. We have people here on the grounds of the Legislature; they're demonstrating against this government's inaction. They would rather be working than demonstrating. The reason they've lost their jobs or can't start the jobs for which they've trained for months is because they've been held hostage by a strike that continues to drag on. Today, we hear that Serco presented what it referred to as its final offer.

I want to know from the minister: Given the fact that the union has rejected that offer, will he now step in, exercise the authority that he has and put an end to this strike so that people can get back to work?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

I understand that individuals have been negatively impacted by this strike, and those that have been inconvenienced by this situation, be it truckers or new drivers or anyone—I can remember, at age 16, how eager I was to get my licence.

However, that being said, I want to remind the member opposite that we must trust and respect the collective bargaining process. We have some of our best mediators working on these negotiations, and they are making positive progress. As the member was mentioning, my understanding is that the union has agreed to present the employer's final offer to the membership this week. This means that the collective bargaining process—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: People are out of jobs, they're hurting, and we have more rhetoric from the minister.

The reality is that he does not understand that the reason people felt compelled to come to Queen's Park today is because this government has not been listening. They don't believe that this process is working for them. People need this minister to assume the responsibility and the authority that he has to ensure that this doesn't continue to drag out, so that people have an opportunity to take on the jobs for which they're trained.

This is not about a 16-year-old wanting his licence; it's about adults who have lost their jobs, who cannot get to work, and it has gone on long enough. On behalf of the official opposition and people across the province, I am calling for the minister to step in and put an end to the strike once and for all.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can agree with the member on is that some negotiations can be very challenging, and they may take place, as this one does, in the public eye. But again, to remind the member, it's not only the responsibility of the employer and the union to work through the collective bargaining process; it is their right. I think this member is asking to take away that right of the collective bargaining process. I do not agree with what the member is asking for. I trust that the employer and the union will work as hard as they can to conclude with a collective agreement.

I want to commend those who are at the table in these difficult negotiations. They're finding common ground. We have a terrific record of labour relations in this province, and we will continue with our mediators to—

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

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Jake Allin is a 16-year-old student from Aylmer

who has a question, and his 8,000 Facebook friends also have a question that they would like the Premier to answer. The question is this: How can the government require a driver's licence but not have the power to ensure timely access to drivers' testing and licensing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question in the absence of Minister Bradley. What I can say is that we are working as hard as we can to provide access to drivers' testing at the earliest possible opportunity to take advantage of new drivers who are coming on the scene. Not only does this open up some employment responsibilities for our newest drivers, but it also enables them to take on some social and family responsibilities to help out at home. Those are the kinds of things that I can say at the highest level.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The McGuinty government has taken steps to help experienced drivers by extending their licences during the work stoppage at DriveTest. Why is the government ignoring new and young drivers like Jake and his 8,000 Facebook friends?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The Minister of Transportation has been working with the parties to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will come to order, please.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First is to say again that we understand the inconvenience that those who are waiting to take their driver's test are going through; also, those who have been negatively impacted, like the truckers. I do have here from the Minister of Transportation, who could not be with us here today, that that's why we have put in place a temporary regulation to ensure that drivers who require a test to renew their licence can continue driving. It's also why Serco has been calling DriveTest applicants prior to their booked tests to inform them of the strike.

The Ministry of Transportation has been working actively to help get the message out to all those who are being inconvenienced by this situation. The Ministry of Labour is working as hard as it can with some of the best mediators that we have, not only in the country, but, I've been told, in the world. They are working to help the parties so that they can conclude with—

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

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TIRE DISPOSAL

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, as you have said in the House, Ontario farmers consider themselves the first stewards of the land. They are aware of the finite land and resources that are available to us and look to improve their practices to ensure that we leave

healthy and ample resources for our children and for generations to come.

There continue to be sound environmental techniques and practices developed that would be of interest to farmers to increase their environmental sustainability. Minister, what information and resources are available to Ontario farmers to increase their environmental management efforts?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government is very happy to work in partnership with farmers in Ontario to assist them to continue their environmental stewardship. That is why, in June of this year, we announced the Growing Forward environmental and climate change program. This is a program that supports initiatives that farmers want to implement on their farms.

The program includes both on-farm and food sector components. The on-farm component includes the environmental farm plan. This is a program that has been in place for a number of years. Farmers told us that it was very important to them that we continue providing resources for that, and in fact we have done so: A total of \$41.8 million in funding is available to support farmers who would be looking to implement environmental farm plans. Also, a total of \$500,000 is available to the food sector to improve their capacity for environmental strategies—

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: The farmers I know are all very concerned about the environment and would certainly take every opportunity, such as the programs just outlined, to protect the land and the resources that they and we depend on.

The member from Dufferin–Caledon rose in the House a couple of weeks ago to bring up the cost of the environmental stewardship fee on tires and requested that farmers be exempt from the environmental stewardship program, as she felt the cost to replace a tractor tire was prohibitive. Then, the next day, on a radio show in my riding, the member continued to provide figures that the replacement—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I'm going to ask the honourable member to consider the rephrasing of aspects of her question.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: And the credibility of it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And the credibility of it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable members to please listen to the Speaker. The clock is stopped.

I've raised an issue about appropriate language in the House on a number of occasions, and I think it's possible for members to ask questions without insinuating misrepresentation on the part of other members. I would just ask the honourable member to be conscious of that or I will be forced to just pass and go to the next question.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Speaker.

So the entire Ontario tire stewardship program and the cost to Ontario farmers: What I'm looking for is for the

minister to clarify the cost of replacing agricultural tires and the linkage to the environment.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is a very good question, and we do recognize that farmers want to participate in every initiative that is going to protect our environment.

What I would say to the members of this assembly is that typically farmers, who would pay between \$1,000 and \$2,500 for a tractor tire, will be required to pay a fee of \$15.84 for the disposal of that tire. This will replace a tire tax that they have been paying that was never directed toward the recycling of the tires. I think it's important to remember that there is a \$250 fee applied for those tires that might be used in the construction industry or the mining industry; those very large tires. But I would say that typically for farmers, the disposal fee for tires for farm implements is \$15.84—

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

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. The consulting feeding frenzy in the McGuinty government goes far beyond eHealth; it includes provincial government ministries as well as government agencies. Recently, this House learned that over \$1 million every day is being spent on consultants working for various provincial ministries. Minister, can you explain why almost one quarter of the \$390-million consulting bill comes from your ministry and will you tell the taxpayers of Ontario how this government spent the money?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I am very pleased to answer this question. Let me just put things in perspective. In 2001-02, when their government was in power, the total expense on consultants was \$656 million. That number now stands, for 2006-07, at around \$377 million. So you can see the math: from \$656 million to \$377 million. There's a significant decrease in the number of consultants that are being employed in the ministries. It has become sometimes necessary to employ very specialized skills. That's why different ministries actually employ consultants. I will be more than pleased to answer the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, this is 2009. You've already squandered \$1 billion; now you're spending \$1 million a day, and provincial government technology resources still aren't providing the level of service that you promised. This would include information technology which was at the very heart of the eHealth scandal that we're still talking about, and yet there are no answers or clarity.

Minister, how many more eHealth-type scandals are you hiding within your ministry? This is outrageous.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would say that they're buried in your ministry.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, you need to withdraw the comment.

Mr. John O'Toole: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I'm surprised at this question because the honourable member on the other side asked me to give him the full briefings on every issue; we offered that. He was given the full briefing. I guess even after those meetings he really didn't understand what he was being briefed on. But let me tell you, I think most of the—

Mr. John O'Toole: That's a personal insult. Take it back.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I believe what I heard, I heard, and I would ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. John O'Toole: I—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thought I heard a very negative comment, but—

Mr. John O'Toole: I said it was personal. He should withdraw it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thought I heard something—just withdraw.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Most of the consulting expenses in my ministry are actually for collective agreements. We signed almost all collective agreements last year, and that's where the expenses were. A full briefing was given to the member on the other side to actually highlight all of these issues when he met with my ministry staff.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, in 2003 the province privatized driver testing. Many, including the NDP and the Liberal opposition of the day, warned that this move would lead to a reduction of full-time staff in favour of more part-time staff, which in turn would affect public safety.

Last summer the workers at Serco decided enough was enough, now that more than 50% of the staff at Serco are now part-time, affecting public safety. It has now become a central issue in bargaining, and that is what the strike is all about.

Premier, this part-time issue is very similar to the issue that was central to the LCBO strike. My question is as follows: If the province was prepared to intervene in the LCBO strike, are you prepared to do the same with driver tests?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I refer this to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again I would like to thank the member for the question. It gives me the opportunity to

speak to the good work that our mediators are doing with the parties. They continue to work with Serco and the Steelworkers and help them find common ground at the negotiating table.

We know that a collective agreement that is negotiated through that process is the most stable and productive agreement that can be had. That is what we are working towards. As I have mentioned, I understand that the union has agreed to present the employer's final offer to their membership this week. It shows that the collective bargaining process works. Through the Ministry of Transportation, we have done what we can to allow those drivers who cannot take—

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

1130

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Let me see if I've got this straight. When it comes to booze in the province of Ontario, the province is prepared to intervene and find a settlement so that the government can keep on reaping the benefits of selling booze and allowing the public to get what they want from LCBO outlets. But when it comes to public safety and the essentials of being able to get a driver's licence, the province is saying, "No, we're not going to intervene." What's different? If you were able to intervene on the LCBO strike, you should be able to do the same on DriveTest. After all, it is a provincial service. Will you do so?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member that the NDP, of all parties, should be respecting the collective bargaining process. We respect that process; we trust in that process. We know that it provides the best agreements for parties.

We have taken steps beyond the negotiations and the mediation that we are providing through the Ministry of Transportation. We have taken steps to minimize the impact on drivers and businesses alike. Drivers who require tests now can continue driving until the strike is resolved. The majority of licensed drivers can continue to renew their G licences at ServiceOntario. I encourage all those who want more information to visit our website at the Ministry of Transportation.

We will continue to work with the parties—

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

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED ACCESSIBILITÉ POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: My question is for the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, my constituents and many of my municipal counterparts are coming to me with concerns about budgets that have been stretched. As of January 2010, municipalities, along with public sector organizations, will need to begin complying with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and,

more specifically, the accessible customer service standard. The private sector, of course, will follow suit in 2012.

My riding, like others, has been hit by the global economic recession. I'm hearing that the full cost of implementing accessibility standards may be a heavy burden to carry. Minister, is there a plan for offsetting accessibility costs?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to my colleague for this excellent question. I want to remind all of us that while some look at accessibility as a cost, others know that it is an opportunity. Accessibility should not be seen as a burden but as a good business practice.

Currently, one in seven Ontarians has a disability. This is expected to rise to one in five in 20 years, so more and more citizens will expect barrier-free environments and services.

Canadians with disabilities have spending power of \$26 billion. This is a market that no business can afford to overlook. Imagine what that spending power will be in—

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

M. Shafiq Qadri: Une question supplémentaire : madame la Ministre, je suis d'accord avec vous. Aucune entreprise de ma circonscription ne peut se permettre d'ignorer un pouvoir de dépense de 26 \$ milliards. À mesure que vieillit la population de la génération du « baby boom », il devient de plus en plus crucial de créer une société accessible. Mais les municipalités, y compris celles de ma circonscription, s'inquiètent de leur capacité à rendre leurs collectivités pleinement accessibles d'ici 2025.

Madame la Ministre, que fait exactement le gouvernement McGuinty pour aider les municipalités comme la mienne à mettre en œuvre ce plan d'accessibilité?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: En fait, ils ont le pouvoir de dépenser 26 \$ milliards, ce que nous ne pouvons ignorer parce que présentement, il y a une personne sur sept qui a une forme d'handicap, et dans 20 ans, il y en aura une sur cinq. Alors, à mesure que les gens vieillissent, la population de la génération du « baby boom », il devient de plus en plus crucial de créer une société accessible. Mais les municipalités, y compris celles de ma circonscription, s'inquiètent de leur capacité à rendre leurs collectivités pleinement accessibles d'ici 2025.

L'année dernière, notre premier ministre a annoncé un investissement d'un milliard de dollars dans des projets qui vont améliorer les transports en commun, les routes et les ponts, et d'autres projets municipaux comme l'accessibilité des services municipaux aux personnes handicapées.

Les 1,85 millions d'Ontariens et Ontariennes handicapés sont aussi des contribuables qui ont le droit à accéder aux mêmes services, bâtiments, magasins et emplois—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome this afternoon to the House Bruce Bodden, president and CEO of MMM Group Ltd.; Bill Longden, vice-chair of MMM Group Ltd.; David Bannister, past chair, York Central Hospital board of trustees; Janice Bannister; Kathryn Bannister; James Bannister; Warren Collier, chair, York Central Hospital board of trustees; Rodney Webb, board member, York Central Hospital; Jo-anne Marr, acting president and CEO, York Central Hospital; and Melina Cormier, acting chief of communications and public affairs, York Central Hospital.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for London North Centre on her recent appointment and to wish her well in her job as Ontario's new Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

I would also like to let the new minister know that the residents of Markdale cannot wait any longer for the government to decide on a firm date for the construction of their new hospital. They're ready, Minister.

Six years and four health ministers later, the community of Markdale is no closer to getting a new hospital. As the minister may be aware, the Markdale community fund drive has netted an incredible \$13 million toward the new hospital. The minister's predecessor has given \$3 million toward the planning and design of the new facility. Then, last March, a sign unveiling was held at the future site of the hospital—but still no hospital.

More than 20,000 people rely on the aging Centre Grey hospital. Originally established in the 1940s, it's the only hospital between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor.

The proposed rural health centre would include acute care services, 24-hour emergency services, labs, day surgery, in-patient and outpatient service, and physiotherapy.

So you understand why the Markdale hospital is and will continue to be a major priority for me. I won't rest until the Minister of Health recognizes the need and gives us the go-ahead and support to proceed with detailed planning for the new hospital our community deserves.

FLU PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I've received communication from one of my constituents that I want to read out to the Legislature. It bears on H1N1 and the lack of preparation on the part of this government for the flu that we're dealing with right now. My constituent writes:

"Yesterday, my wife called Telehealth Ontario to seek advice for my son, who had a raging fever and several

symptoms of the H1N1 virus. She was told it would be a nine-hour wait and she would receive a call back from Telehealth Ontario.

“It has been over 24 hours and still we have not received the promised call back. Emergency rooms are packed; family doctors are overwhelmed; vaccinations are at a standstill. Furthermore, the rollout of the vaccinations has been marred by simple mismanagement from top to bottom.”

The constituent writes that he can’t understand why health officials haven’t enlisted the aid of the network of family doctors to vaccinate those who wish it. He asks why we haven’t done as well as other jurisdictions, such as Winnipeg, Manitoba.

He asked that I bring his concerns to those in the Legislature who need to hear them.

This government has not prepared adequately for this flu. It did not recognize that there would be a surge in need for support. It did not make the planning. It has let down the people of this province.

DAVID BANNISTER

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise here today to recognize the hard work and dedication of David Bannister, past chair of the board of trustees of York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill. He and his wife, Janice, are long-time residents of Richmond Hill and have two lovely children, Kathryn and James.

David’s deep commitment and tireless dedication over the past 10 years has made a real difference in helping to make York Central Hospital one of the finest community hospitals in Ontario.

On behalf of residents of my riding of Richmond Hill, I want to offer my sincere thanks to David Bannister for his leadership, dedication and volunteerism, and I wish him a great success in his future endeavours.

David holds a master’s of applied science degree in structural engineering and is a partner and vice-president of one of Ontario’s major multi-disciplined consulting engineering firms. In 1999, David was first elected as a trustee. Since that time, he has served as chair of the board, vice-chair of the board and the chair of the operations, governance and redevelopment committees. During his tenure as chair of the board of York Central hospital, David also served as chair of the executive committee.

GRAIN FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I’m pleased to rise today to recognize the great work of the Ontario Soybean Growers and Grain Farmers of Ontario and welcome them to Queen’s Park today. As you may know, the Grain Farmers of Ontario is a new organization that has been formed by the merger of the Ontario Corn Producers’ Association, the Ontario Soybean Growers, and the Ontario Wheat Producers’ Marketing Board.

Just over two months ago, I was pleased to attend the launch of the Grain Farmers of Ontario brand, which was held in Ingersoll, in the great riding of Oxford. I want to congratulate them on working together so they can ensure that they are delivering a coordinated message on what government can do to help the grain and oilseed producers and on working together to more effectively help the 28,000 farmers who grow corn, soybeans and wheat in Ontario. These farms are an important part of our agriculture industry, and the crops they grow generate over \$2.5 billion in farmgate receipts.

I want to thank the grain farmers and the soybean growers for coming to Queen’s Park to update us on the state of their industry and to share the concerns of their farmers. Our leader, Tim Hudak, and I are meeting with them this afternoon, and we are very much looking forward to hearing about their organization’s progress and the challenges that their farmers are facing. I hope that all members in this Legislature will make a visit to their reception this evening in committee room 2 to learn more about the new Grain Farmers of Ontario organization and to try some of their soy snacks and beverages. Thank you very much for allowing me to present this statement.

CPR MONTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: November is CPR Awareness Month, and we should all take a moment to consider the heroic and selfless efforts that individuals trained in CPR undertake to help people in their most critical hour. CPR is quite literally the difference between life and death, and while it is sad that every person cannot be saved, we must celebrate the many, many who are. Most of all, we must be thankful for those individuals who have given their time and energy to learn or teach this vital skill.

I would like to share a story of a young woman from Ottawa named Kasia. This 17-year-old student was vacationing in Halifax when she saw a stranger collapse. The man had no pulse. It had been two years since Kasia had learned CPR at Ottawa’s St. Pius X High School, but she remembered what do. She began CPR and, with help from another bystander, continued until the ambulance arrived. Thanks to her, that man’s life was saved.

Thanks also to ACT Foundation, whose hard work and dedication ensured Kasia had the skills to be that hero. Over 900,000 youth have been trained in CPR to date, as a result of their program. There are generous local sponsors in every community as well as major provincial and national partners that helps ACT to fulfill their mission.

I’m proud that the Ontario government contributed \$650,000 in 2004 to help with the cost of mannequins and, last year, an additional \$1.4 million towards ACT’s automated external defibrillator program.

I would also like to recognize the Heart and Stroke Foundation for their dedicated efforts in advocacy, particularly through the Restart a Heart, Restart a Life program.

JOAN KIMBALL

Mr. John O'Toole: It is my privilege to rise today and pay tribute to a leading entrepreneur in my riding of Durham, who was recently featured on the cover of Active Adult magazine.

Joan Kimball is the owner of Village Card and Gift Shoppe in Newcastle, Ontario. It has been 15 years since this former manager of a dental office embarked on her own new venture, which has brought to Newcastle the gifts, treasures and collectibles often associated only with big-city boutiques. The article in Active included an extensive photo spread of the store's festive giftware. It pointed out the innovation of Joan Kimball. Thanks to the Internet, packages often leave the Village Card and Gift Shoppe for customers around the world.

1510

Joan keeps up a high profile in the community through appearances on TV shows such as Rogers' Daytime. Through special events at the shop, she brings talented artists and artisans to the village of Newcastle.

I would like to pay tribute to Joan Kimball for creating a special store where the spirit of giving lasts all year. Congratulations to Joan and staff.

MARKHAM STOUFFVILLE HOSPITAL

Ms. Helena Jaczek: June 25, 2009, was a red letter day in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. Premier McGuinty came to the Markham Stouffville Hospital to announce that the province of Ontario has committed \$35.5 million for the detailed-design stage of the expansion of Markham Stouffville Hospital. The grant will enable the Markham Stouffville Hospital to have shovels in the ground in 2010 and the expansion completed in 2014.

The Markham Stouffville Hospital, led by president and CEO Janet Beed, was built in 1989 to provide health care services to a community of 110,000. However, it currently serves a population of 300,000.

The expansion project includes an addition that will double the size of the hospital facility, and a number of other areas will be updated and renovated, including an improved and expanded ambulatory care centre, a doubled emergency department, an enhanced maternal child centre and a larger mental health centre and diagnostic imaging department.

These improvements will translate into shorter wait times, up to 4,000 childbirths per year, increased access to diagnostic tests, an expanded cardiology program, 100 new additional in-patient beds, eight new operating rooms, increased outpatient service and a child and adolescent day treatment program.

I wish to congratulate the board of directors' executive committee members: Gerard Gervais, Warren Justin, Mario Belanger, John F.T. Scott and Janet Beed, and all the board of directors' community, medical, government and foundation members.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Eric Hoskins: Our government is working hard to make H1N1 vaccinations available to Ontarians as quickly as possible. So far, we have vaccinated hundreds of thousands of people in Ontario, focusing on those in the high-priority groups.

To ensure even more people are able to receive the vaccine this week, we are doubling the number of clinics administering the vaccine. By end of day Saturday, we hope to have vaccinated more than two million Ontarians.

We also want to ensure that Ontarians are receiving the information they need to protect themselves and their families. All available resources have been put on the phone lines and additional staff have been hired. Ontarians can also contact their local health professionals to get more information on where to get the vaccine, or visit ontario.ca/flu to learn more.

This week, we will focus on the high-priority groups. These groups include our health care workers; pregnant women; healthy children between six months of age and under five years old; anyone under 65 with chronic medical conditions; household contacts of people who cannot be immunized—for example, the parents of an infant under six months of age; and people in remote and isolated areas of the province.

Ontarians who are not among those high-priority groups will be able to roll up their sleeves once high-priority groups have had their chance to be vaccinated and further vaccine becomes available.

As a doctor and public health specialist, I have confidence in the extraordinary efforts being made by our public health experts and want to assure Ontarians that our government will continue to work with our dedicated nurses and health care professionals to ensure every Ontarian who wants this vaccine will be able to protect themselves and their families.

GRAIN FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mr. Jim Brownell: Today at Queen's Park, our friends from the Grain Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Soybean Growers are talking about the future of Ontario's economy. The Grain Farmers of Ontario represents Ontario's 28,000 growers of corn, soybeans and wheat. These crops generate over \$2.5 billion in farmgate receipts, resulting in over \$9 billion in economic output, and are responsible for over 40,000 jobs in the province.

The Grain Farmers of Ontario is the province's newest and largest farm commodity group. It represents the merged interests of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association, the Ontario Soybean Growers and the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board. These three groups have worked closely with the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission to carefully seek farmers' input.

As a wonder crop, soybeans produce soy meal and soy oil. Soy oil can be used to replace crude oil and diesel,

creating biodiesel, which helps clean the air and wean ourselves from our dependence on oil.

The Ontario Soybean Growers have even built a demonstration project, a soy house filled with many soy-based products such as fixtures, furniture and foods. The soy house, on view at the Royal Winter Fair in the coming weeks, shows the innovative spirit of the Ontario bioproducts economy, an economy where the entire length of the supply chain is in Ontario, from farmers' fields to our consumers.

Soy continues to be Ontario's largest crop, and I join my colleagues in the Legislature in support of the vital contribution of the entire soy bioproduct industry to our economy. I invite one and all to the Ontario Soybean reception in committee room 2 at 5 p.m. today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the November 3, 2009, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUBLIC HOSPITALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES HÔPITAUX PUBLICS

Mrs. Albanese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to amend the Public Hospitals Act to require the provision of information sheets to patients / Projet de loi 216, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les hôpitaux publics afin d'exiger la remise de feuilles de renseignements aux malades.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: This bill amends the Public Hospitals Act to require the administrator of a hospital to ensure that each patient received at the hospital is given an information sheet setting out information regarding services available at the hospital, services available in the community and other health care options.

PLANNING AMENDMENT ACT (COMMUNITY GARDENS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE (JARDINS COMMUNAUTAIRES)

Mr. Ruprecht moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 217, An Act to amend the Planning Act to promote community gardens / Projet de loi 217, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire afin de promouvoir les jardins communautaires.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This bill will introduce legislation to promote and encourage the creation of community gardens in municipalities right across Ontario. Now, why should we encourage community vegetable gardens?

Interjection: Why?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Because it will provide green space, and local residents will be able to cultivate flowers and fruits and vegetables—in fact, healthy foods which can be consumed by residents. Community vegetable gardens should be expanded in every municipality right across Ontario.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH MOIS DE LA PRÉVENTION DE LA VIOLENCE FAITE AUX FEMMES

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I rise today to acknowledge November as Woman Abuse Prevention Month. This is a month to reaffirm our collective responsibility to end violence against women.

Je pense avec admiration aux femmes que j'ai rencontrées, des femmes qui, ayant vécu la violence familiale, ont pourtant réussi à bâtir une vie meilleure pour elles-mêmes et pour leurs enfants.

Their stories are inspiring and compel us to do more and to do better in preventing woman abuse. Violence against women is unacceptable.

In addition to acknowledging the strength of survivors, I also want to take the time to appreciate the tireless efforts of professionals and organizations that help these women and their children rebuild their lives. They deserve our thanks.

1520

Même si nous faisons beaucoup pour aider les femmes victimes de violence, nous savons que cette violence ne

cessera pas sans les efforts continus et concertés du gouvernement, des collectivités et des personnes.

Communities across Ontario are taking action to end violence against women, and this government has made significant progress in investing in the kinds of community programs that we know are so important to both protect and support women and their children. Last year, we invested \$18.8 million in additional annualized funding for women's shelters and second-stage housing. This funding will give more Ontario women a place to go and obtain services they need to start over.

Our government has increased funding to community-based violence-against-women prevention services by 46% since 2003. In August of 2008, this government announced \$1.5 million for Ontario's 42 domestic violence community coordinating committees, to improve co-ordination among the many agencies that serve victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a serious crime. Last month, part of Ontario's family law reform legislation that strengthens enforcement of restraining orders came into force. These reforms will offer more protection to women who are being abused. Our government has also introduced changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act which will help to address sexual harassment and domestic violence in the workplace.

Avec l'appui continu du Parlement, nous rendrons les milieux de travail plus sécuritaires pour nos sœurs, filles, amies et voisines.

We know that there's more to do. That's why I am so personally committed to the domestic violence action plan, and that's why we are working closely with our partners in the sector to move ahead with some of the domestic violence advisory council's recommendations. Freedom from violence is a human rights issue.

Dans quelques jours, le 25 novembre marquera la Journée nationale de commémoration et d'action contre la violence faite aux femmes. Partout dans le monde les collectivités renouvelleront leur engagement à en faire plus pour mettre fin à la violence faite aux femmes et pour les droits à la sécurité des filles chez elles et au sein de leur collectivité.

As well, on that day the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada will join 54 other countries in launching its annual 10-day campaign to educate young men and boys about this important issue.

It takes all of us to shut the door on violence. Working together, we can open the door to freedom and dignity for all women.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise in the House today to remind all honourable members that this week is Crime Prevention Week in Ontario. This week we celebrate the partnership between law enforcement and the people of Ontario in helping to keep our communities and neighbourhoods safe.

Crime Prevention Week is also a partnership between the government and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. Each year we work together to promote crime prevention across the province. This year's theme is: "Prevention Pays—Get Involved. It's Your Community. It's Your Future." It speaks to the impacts that the actions of individuals and families can have on reducing the incidence of overall crime in Ontario.

The most recent crime statistics paint a picture of a continuous reduction in crime in the province. Ontario experienced a 4% decline in overall crime and a 5% decrease in the severity of crime between 2007 and 2008. Violent crimes in Ontario were down 4% last year from 2007; robberies decreased by 5%; serious assaults were down by 5%; break-and-enter crimes were well below the national average, and declined by 9%; motor vehicle thefts in Ontario were also significantly below the national average and declined by 12% from 2007.

These statistics remind us that Ontario is a safe place but that we have work to do to make it even safer. We commend the people who are working to help prevent crime and keep our communities safe, including our police officers, correctional service workers, probation and parole officers, youth and community organizers, parents and teachers, community volunteers and social workers. These are among the thousands of people who work tirelessly to help make Ontario a better place. I am proud to salute them for their efforts and to offer the support and encouragement of the government of Ontario.

This government is backing up these words of support and encouragement with concrete action. We've made significant investments to support enforcement and crime prevention. These include:

- funding to help municipal and First Nations police services hire 2,000 additional police officers;

- working with police services and the OPP to deploy more than 300 additional officers under the federal police officers recruitment fund;

- funding for policing in high-priority areas with the successful Toronto anti-violence intervention strategy and the broader provincial strategy;

- increasing funding to the Centre of Forensic Sciences to expand its capacity to perform scientific testing of bullets, cartridge cases and firearms;

- targeting illicit marijuana grow ops and crystal meth operations;

- hiring additional probation and parole officers for enhanced supervision of guns-and-gangs offenders; and

- protecting children from predators on the Internet.

These are but a few of the McGuinty government's initiatives in our ongoing fight against crime and the causes of crime. The ongoing collaboration of the police, volunteers, parents and the community will help reduce crime and reinforce the sense of security that Ontarians enjoy in their home communities.

The theme of Crime Prevention Week is a reminder that everyone has a part to play in crime prevention. After all, it's our community and it's our future. Again

this year, we've made available, with the collaboration of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, a home security audit guide to help homeowners identify the steps they need to take to protect their property. It is available for download on our ministry website.

No one group holds a monopoly on crime prevention—not the government, law enforcement, the courts or probation and parole officers. We are all partners in crime prevention, and this is what Crime Prevention Week is all about.

I encourage all members of this House to participate in Crime Prevention Week activities in their host communities and help spread the word that prevention pays. Get involved. It's your community. It's your future. Merci. Thank you. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to respond to the minister's statement.

Since 2005, Ontario has recognized November as Woman Abuse Prevention Month. It's an annual opportunity to raise awareness about violence against women and its prevention.

All women have the right to live in safety and dignity, free from threat, intimidation and violence. Violence against women is never justified.

Unfortunately, violence against women occurs every single day. According to Ontario's domestic violence death review committee, 99 women were killed in domestic incidents between 2002 and 2005, and Statistics Canada indicates that 51% of women have been physically or sexually abused. We have a long way to go before women are safe in our society. Too many tragedies have increased awareness and a need for action.

If the minister and her government are truly committed to preventing violence against women, then they must be prepared to take all the necessary steps, and this includes assisting Ms. Patricia Marshall and her two daughters in St. Catharines. On numerous occasions, the official opposition has asked the Attorney General to assist these women. Yet, despite compelling evidence, including video footage, the crown withdrew its criminal harassment charges. The government's lack of action has dismayed several women's shelters, including Gillian's Place, one of Ontario's first shelters for abused women and children. According to Susanne DiLalla, chair of Gillian's Place, "Not only has this decision caused these women great distress, but it sends a message to all women that this behaviour is acceptable and the justice system will not prevail to protect them."

1530

We must do all we can to ensure that women can walk alone at night without fear and ensure that they are not vulnerable at home or in the workplace or at school.

It's critical that we are familiar with the warning signs of abuse. By understanding these warning signs, we can

help. Victims of abuse cover their bruises, they sometimes use alcohol or drugs to cope with their pain, they may seem nervous around their partner, and victims always seem withdrawn.

The root causes of violence against women are societal, and so the solutions lie ultimately in changing values and behaviours so that the outcome is equality between men and women. Research shows that positive attitudes adopted at an early age can tackle violence before it happens. The government can certainly do more to reduce the rates of violence by fostering resilience and self-esteem amongst girls and young women.

Moving forward, our caucus will do everything in its power to ensure that reducing violence against women and children stays hot on this government's agenda.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very pleased this afternoon to respond to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on his comments on Crime Prevention Week. I would like to begin by thanking all of the key stakeholders, particularly groups like the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, under the leadership of Chief Dan Parkinson; the Police Association of Ontario, under the leadership of Larry Molyneaux and Ron Middel; and the Ontario Provincial Police Association, under the leadership of President Karl Walsh.

We're very proud of the relationship that the Progressive Conservative caucus has had with the policing community for many, many years now, and look forward to working on an even more collaborative effort in the future.

Obviously, the minister's comments show that some parts of crime are decreasing. However, we must keep in mind that as we look at more difficult economic times, many social programs will be increasing. We've already seen it with the demand on children's aid societies and many social programs. Welfare rates are up, and in many cases, this leads to family disputes and issues that police have to respond to.

Although the government has a large deficit right now—it's almost \$25 billion—I think we have to keep in mind that one area we cannot have any cuts in is the area of policing. We need to have our police services on the roads. We need to have them in our communities. They have to be very, very visible.

Our party will be keeping a close eye on crime prevention and the efforts of this government as we move forward in the future.

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my honour to rise on behalf of the New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to respond to the Woman Abuse Prevention Month statement by the minister.

Over 12 years of counselling women trying to escape abuse has taught me that they all ask for four actions on behalf of their government.

(1) What they need to escape an abusive partner is affordable child care. A woman cannot leave her partner unless she has care for her children. We don't have affordable child care in Ontario. We do in Manitoba: \$17 a day. We do in Quebec: \$7 a day. But we don't here in Ontario.

(2) Women who've tried to escape an abusive partner need housing. They need, first of all, temporary shelter housing, and that we don't have in Ontario, either. If you speak to anybody who works in the shelter system, they will tell you there are not enough beds and there's not enough money to accommodate the needs of women escaping abuse. And they need permanent housing. We have 130,000 families in Ontario waiting for affordable housing, many of those women and children.

(3) They need a minimum wage that's above the poverty line, because two thirds of minimum wage earners are women, mainly immigrant women. If women cannot earn a wage that will keep them and their children, they cannot leave an abusive spouse. They need a living wage.

(4) They need pay equity—enforced pay equity—because women in this province make 71 cents to every dollar a man makes. That's shameful after 20 years of legislation, because there's no money to put teeth into that legislation.

I would add to their demands a fifth one, and that is that we need to pass the harassment-and-violence-in-the-workplace law that our leader Andrea Horwath tabled and this government refuses to pass, which would protect women like Lori Dupont and Theresa Vince, who were killed in their workplaces. We need laws that are going to protect women when they go to work, as well as protect them so that they can leave abusive situations at home.

We have a whole month in which this government could act to stop women living with abusive partners and allow them an escape route—one whole month; five simple, simple acts that this government could take. All it takes is political will, but instead, what did we see? We saw a budget that didn't even mention women, that didn't mention women's issues. We don't think women are a priority for this government; neither do women in the province of Ontario. This month is a chance to change all that.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Interesting; first of all, I want to echo our feelings as a caucus and the positions we have taken in regard to making our community safer. New Democrats understand that we all have a responsibility, in the end, to make sure that our communities are safe, and this week is a good week to remember our collective responsibility—not only police officers and lawmakers and people in the courts, but I think society as a whole—when it comes to making sure that our communities are safer, and I would echo that.

I just want to raise, because we have the opportunity to do this here—there are a few things that we can do, I

think, to make our lives simpler as residents and also, I think, for the police. We met last week, as probably members of the government did, with people from the real estate association. They raised a really interesting point in the meetings that they had with us, and that was the issue of grow ops and meth labs.

One of the things they were arguing, and I think it makes a lot of sense, is that one of things that we can do to facilitate making sure we deal with this so that it's transparent and people know what's going on and they can be well informed, is to make a very simple change to legislation that would say we would register those homes that have been used for grow ops or meth labs on title at the land registry office. That way, a person who's buying a house would know so right up front; there would be no question as to what that particular building was used for, and it would make it very transparent. I thought that was a very good suggestion that the real estate association brought before us and something that I think this government should consider.

I was going to make the point that for years now, the real estate association has been coming before us, asking for this particular change, and for whatever reason the government has decided not to do that. So if this is Crime Prevention Week, we certainly have a way that we can, if we decided as legislators, if the government decided to utilize its majority, put forward an amendment to the acts in order to make sure that we do what we're being asked to do by the real estate association, and that is to register on title those homes that have been used and those properties that were used for either meth labs or grow ops.

It would be a good tool for residents and a good tool for citizens and the police.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly:

“Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over \$400,000; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

“Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers.”

I have signed this and will send it down with Nithya.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J’ai une pétition qui m’a été livrée par Pierre Carrière d’Embrun. Cette pétition contient au-delà de 1 000 signatures.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Government Services intends to close or move to another location in the township of Russell the Embrun licence bureau presently located at 717 Notre Dame St. in the village of Embrun in the township of Russell;

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

“Say no to the closure or move of the Embrun licence bureau and say yes to the establishment of an expanded office of ServiceOntario at 717 Notre Dame St. in the village of Embrun in the township of Russell.”

1540

HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the community of Waubaushene in the township of Tay has two entrances off Highway 400, one of which is the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp; and

“Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp ... has had numerous accidents, including fatalities, over the past two decades; and

“Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp entrance is very confusing and awkward for drivers trying to make left-hand turns onto Highway 12 from either Pine Street or the Highway 400 ramp; and

“Whereas the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay have expressed grave concerns over the safety of the Pine Street-Highway 400 and Highway 12 intersection; and

“Whereas there is a strong feeling in the community that traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection would save lives;

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

“That the government of Ontario support the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay and immediately install traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection.”

I’m pleased to sign this and give it to Rebecca to take to the table.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: It’s my pleasure to present a petition from the people of the riding of Sudbury, asking for PET scanning. It goes as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured ... service available” to people under certain conditions; and

“Whereas, by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario” as follows: “to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it to the clerk with page Madeline.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craiton: I’m pleased to introduce this petition from Grandparents Requesting Access and Dignity. I want to thank Joan Brooks, the president, for providing me with all these petitions. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by” the member from Niagara Falls.

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign my signature in support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity to remind the honourable members of an important health and safety issue for our interpreters, and that is the BlackBerrys. If you’re going to be speaking,

please—better yet, don't even bring the BlackBerry into the chamber—keep the BlackBerry away from the micro-phones and do not even keep it in your desk. The vibrations do cause serious irritations to our interpreters. I think it is in the best interests of all of us that we look out for the health and safety of our employees.

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

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

“Whereas Elmvale District High School is an important part of the community of Elmvale and surrounding area; and

“Whereas the school is widely recognized as having high educational requirements and is well known for producing exceptional graduates who have gone on to work as professionals in health care, agriculture, community safety, the trades and many other fields that give back to the community; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that ‘Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we’re not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them’; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn't found any money to keep an actual rural school open in Elmvale;

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

“That the Minister of Education support the citizens of Elmvale and flow funding to the local school board so that Elmvale District High School can remain open to serve the vibrant community of Elmvale and surrounding area.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

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

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

“Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

“Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

“Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS).”

I agree with this petition. I've signed it and I send it to the table via page Vladislav.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition that concerns the Ontario budget:

“Whereas a global economic downturn calls for bold and decisive action by the government of Ontario to ensure that Ontario remains the most attractive and competitive place in North America to set up or relocate a business, raise a family or build a career; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced a budget that reduces taxes for individuals and businesses, takes immediate steps to aid small businesses and manufacturers and expands training, literacy and apprenticeship programs; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario, with its export-oriented economy and vibrant small business sector, needs to move past a sales tax system that sees a single sales transaction subject to two separate taxes levied by two levels of government under two separate sets of rules at two different rates and collected by two different bureaucracies;

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

“That the elected members of all parties support the comprehensive set of financial and tax reforms ... and in particular implement the proposed single sales tax to enable Ontario to emerge from the current economic downturn in a position to enhance its world-leading position and to attract, build and retain the people, careers and companies that will lead our province forward to a prosperous tomorrow.”

Since I agree, I'm glad to sign this petition.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a number of petitions. I'm not sure which one to actually read, but we'll start with this one.

“Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province's underserved area program (UAP) that may result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed doctors; and

“Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep doctors are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in small communities; and

“Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty's now-forgotten health tax since 2004, expecting health care services to be improved rather than cut; and

“Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the

wasteful and abusive spending under the McGuinty Liberals' watch at eHealth Ontario;

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

"That the McGuinty government not reduce or eliminate financial incentives rural communities and small towns need to attract and retain doctors."

I'm pleased to present this to Nithya.

1550

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to present this petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I especially want to thank Colleen Patterson of Brampton and Kim Dollimore of Vista Drive in my home riding of Mississauga–Streetsville. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita ... funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers. Child poverty in Peel has grown from 14% to 20% between 2001 and 2006.... ; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

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

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I completely agree with this petition, will affix my signature in support of it and ask page Katelyn to carry it for me.

PENSION PLANS

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

"Whereas several paramedics in Simcoe county had their pensions affected when paramedic services were transferred to the county of Simcoe, as their pensions were not transferred with them from HOOPP and OPTrust to OMERS, meaning they will receive significantly reduced pensions because their transfer did not recognize their years of continuous service; and

"Whereas when these paramedics started with their new employer, the county of Simcoe, their past pensionable years were not recognized because of existing pension legislation; and

"Whereas the government's own Expert Commission on Pensions has recommended that the government move swiftly to address this issue; and

"Whereas the government should recognize this issue as a technicality and not penalize hard-working paramedics;

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

"That the Minister of Finance support Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson's resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions to OMERS from HOOPP or OPTrust."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of Ontarians from the Windsor area, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

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

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

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

YOUTH ACTION ALLIANCE

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Health Promotion is planning on cancelling funding for the Youth Action Alliance program without looking at its effectiveness in rural Ontario; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance has mobilized youth in the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound" and Middlesex "area around health issues of importance, including the dangers of smoking, second-hand smoke and illegal cigarettes; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance program is an opportunity for youth in the area to build leadership skills and make valuable contributions to their communities;"

We would like to "ask the Minister of Health Promotion to look at each Youth Action Alliance program on an

individual basis and see if it is working effectively and making a difference in its local community and to continue funding those that are working effectively.”

I'll give it to Nithya, and she will deliver it.

OPPOSITION DAY

HEALTH CARE OVERSIGHT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move:

Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has an annual budget of almost \$43 billion, the largest of any ministry;

Whereas the Auditor General in his report on the electronic health initiative explicitly said, “Throughout the years, oversight of the EHR initiative has not been effective”;

Whereas the MOHLTC transfers more than \$14 billion to hospitals and almost \$3 billion to long-term-care facilities;

Whereas neither hospitals nor long-term-care facilities are subject to Ombudsman oversight, nor are they covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; and

Whereas, in a number of other provinces, hospitals and long-term-care facilities are subject to Ombudsman oversight and are covered by freedom-of-information legislation;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should act immediately to ensure that all MOHLTC transfer payment agencies, LHINs and all MOHLTC-funded agencies, boards and commissions are subject to Ombudsman oversight and are covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

This is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 3. Debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to kick off the debate on this motion on behalf of my colleagues in the NDP caucus, because we think it's about time that the province of Ontario moves in the right direction when it comes to putting in place proper oversight for our very-much-revered health institutions in this province.

It's tough times like these when government leaders have an added responsibility. When job losses start to pile up, more and more people are struggling. They're struggling to keep a roof over their head; they're struggling to make ends meet; they're struggling to keep their families clothed and fed. Governments have to be there particularly at that time. They have to be there ensuring that every single tax dollar that is collected from the people of this province is spent wisely, is spent with real deference and with real consideration as to the hardships and difficulties that these families go through, still paying their taxes to be able to get the services they need.

Almost half of the provincial budget, almost half of every tax dollar that's sent here by the people of Ontario, is spent on health care—some \$43 billion every year. That's a lot of money, and we have watched, unfortunately, in the last little while the lack of attention that this government has been paying to how those dollars are being spent. In fact, it's true that not only is it the largest single piece of the government's budget, but it also is a piece of the budget that every single year rises. Every single year, there's more money that is spent on health care. And yet, we've had to sit by and watch the billion-dollar boondoggle at eHealth unfold right before our eyes. We have watched as health care dollars in this province have been squandered by the current government.

In fact, just today in the Toronto Star is another article indicating another \$236 million, another quarter of a billion dollars, spent on a contract for eHealth. This is after the billion-dollar boondoggle that the auditor talked about in his most recent report. This is after that. We saw another quarter of a billion in today's Star being unveiled.

There is less scrutiny of health care in this province than many other ministries. It's unfathomable that the largest single budget item gets some of the least scrutiny whatsoever in the province of Ontario. Our new Minister of Health has said publicly that she wants to ensure that every health care dollar is spent well. Those are fine intentions. We would agree with that. That's why we have this motion before us today. We think that every single health dollar in this province should be spent well, but good intentions don't go very far. Where's the plan of action, we ask this government? Where is the plan of action to make sure that this is a reality?

We know that this particular health ministry isn't really good at plans of action. We saw this with the unrolling of the H1N1 debacle over the last little while in terms of vaccines, so she's obviously not really good at plans of action. We've laid one out in the motion today. We've laid out a plan of action that could get this government on track in terms of making sure that every single health dollar in this province is wisely spent because it would have the appropriate oversight, and that's what we're looking for in this motion.

It's really worrying that when we talk about the expenditure of health dollars in this province, we hear the minister taking up the same mantra that both of her predecessors took up, because what she says, and what they both said, is that the government is spending more money in health care every year. They're spending more money on this program, they're spending more money on that program, and they think that spending money is actually evidence of good health care. Of course, we've seen that that's not necessarily the truth. It doesn't necessarily follow that the spending of dollars actually translates into quality provision of services.

1600

The people in this province are paying approximately, on average, by a family measure, \$3,500 annually on

their health care through their taxes. Given this very significant investment, Ontarians have the right to be assured that if they or their loved ones get sick, they are going to actually have access to timely, high-quality and effective care. We believe the government could actually take concrete steps to make sure that happens, concrete steps to make sure that the effectiveness of health care in this province is there, that the quality is there and that the expenditures are being invested in a way that makes sure that the quality is there and the effectiveness is there.

It's fairly simple, and it's outlined in the motion; that is, to make sure the province extends the freedom-of-information coverage that we think it should have, as well as Ombudsman oversight, to all of the transfer payment- and Ministry of Health-funded agencies, boards and commissions—all of the transfer payment agencies that are funded through the Ministry of Health, all of the LHINs, for example, and all of the other agencies, boards and commissions that are funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

It's very simple. It's a very simple, a very practical and a very reasonable way to add a level of oversight that needs to occur. We have all seen, in the most drastic of ways over the past several weeks and months, the very important necessity to have that extra layer of oversight, that extra layer of accountability in terms of our expenditures on health dollars.

At present it's very unfortunate, and it's like so many other areas where, unfortunately, this province is at the back of the pack. I know my friend Rosario Marchese, the critic for education, will tell you it's the same in the education system, with post-secondary funding particularly: back of the pack. It's the same with oversight for children's aid societies: We're at the back of the pack. And so here we are again when it comes to oversight of our single largest budget item, the most important programs that the people of this province not only fund but rely upon and the ones that they value the greatest, which is their health care programs. And yet Ontario is at the back of the pack because we do not have Ombudsman oversight in health care, we do not have Ombudsman oversight in hospitals, in long-term-care facilities or in any of the other transfer payment agencies. We're at the back of the pack. Other provinces have done this. Other provinces have done this long ago.

It's the same with freedom of information. Other provinces have also already extended the freedom-of-information and protection-of-privacy laws into their health care system. I don't understand why this government does not believe that the people of this province deserve exactly the same kind of expectation, which is to be able to have their Ombudsman do this and to be able to have the freedom-of-information laws applied to this section of their programs, frankly—of their budget, certainly.

The reality is that in Quebec, in Alberta, in Nova Scotia and in Newfoundland, all of those places have their nursing homes and their long-term-care facilities with the oversight of their ombudsman. In 2008-09, the

number of complaints here in Ontario to our Ombudsman about health care doubled over the previous year, so we know that the people of Ontario want this service. They're already calling the Ombudsman's office. They are already asking the Ombudsman to investigate complaints and concerns with health. It doubled to 532 complaints. These were serious complaints. These were complaints concerning people dying of *C. difficile* and influenza due to poor infection control in our hospitals.

I come from Hamilton. We watched as our neighbours in Burlington at Joseph Brant hospital went through the horrifying experience of seeing their loved ones die from a very painful and very debilitating kind of illness when they ended up with *C. difficile*. In fact, the Hamilton Spectator spent many an issue of their newspaper going through all kinds of horrifying stories of the deaths that were happening due to *C. difficile* here in the province of Ontario. The Ombudsman was called upon by so many people to try to get to the bottom of what was happening there, but of course the Ombudsman would have to turn those people away, because in Ontario the Ombudsman has no oversight into what's happening in hospitals. He could do nothing. In fact, some 2,366 complaints had to be turned away by the Ombudsman because they involved either municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals, long-term-care homes, children's aid societies or police.

In fact, New Democrats have been at the front edge of this particular initiative. I, my colleague Rosario Marchese and my colleague France Gélinas have all put in private members' bills calling on the government to expand Ombudsman oversight, particularly to the MUSH sector: municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals—and, of course, long-term care and CASs.

People have a right to know what's happening, and we have seen that this government has been incapable of providing that level of confidence in terms of their internal mechanisms for oversight and accountability. That is why these other mechanisms are so, so important for people: to make sure that they can regain confidence.

What does the Ombudsman do particularly? The Ombudsman has the role of going through these agencies and these organizations with the view of finding what some of the systemic problems might be. And I'm telling you, if there isn't an example of systemic problems and if it isn't in the Ministry of Health and if it wasn't with the eHealth scandal, I don't know what is. If there's one particular issue that points very clearly to why this government should bring Ombudsman oversight into the health care sector, it has got to be eHealth.

The Ombudsman of Ontario himself, André Marin, has been extremely vocal about his desire to open up this particular area to his scrutiny. He has been very clearly asking this government to give him the authority to have oversight into the hospital system, into the long-term-care system, into the health care system overall. In fact, during the *C. difficile* tragedy, this is what the Ombudsman said: "This is exactly the kind of systemic issue which our office would be poised to handle if we had jurisdiction"—if he had jurisdiction.

But it's not just the Ombudsman who is calling for oversight and it's not just the New Democrats who have been calling for oversight of the health care system. In August 2005, the McGuinty government's own Seniors' Secretariat seniors' advisory committee on long-term care recommended the appointment of a seniors' Ombudsman for long-term-care residents in a letter to Minister Smitherman. The members of the advisory committee stated, "We feel the current system, which relies solely on government staff, is simply not responsive enough to ensure seniors' rights are protected in an objective and fair fashion."

In October 2005, the Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario command veterans chastised the McGuinty Liberals for breaking a promise made by Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman, the one I just recounted.

There are people from all quarters who are calling on this government to open up the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, particularly to the Ombudsman and particularly to the FOI process.

I wanted to read one more specific quote from someone who is calling for the same thing, and then I know I have members of my caucus who are very interested in speaking to this issue as well, so I'm going to do that and I'm going to leave the rest of the comments for them to cover off. This one is from OPSEU president Smokey Thomas:

"It's scandalous that at a time when the health care system is being squeezed for every last dime ... the Ministry of Health is deflecting public disclosure by spending millions of dollars in executive salaries and benefits through the back door of publicly supported hospitals.

"This says to me it's time for real public scrutiny, including an expanded role for the Ontario auditor and the opening of hospitals to the freedom-of-information commissioner and the Ombudsman.

"This kind of secrecy with the taxpayers' dollar is unacceptable, and it makes you wonder what else they're hiding."

Mr. Thomas was speaking particularly of the salary of the deputy minister, Ron Sapsford, who is being paid through the back door, through the budget of the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp., a hospital system in my own community.

1610

It's outrageous that these kinds of things continue to happen while this government crows day in and day out about accountability and about transparency. They are doing nothing to get the utmost level of transparency and accountability, because the utmost level of transparency and accountability comes with the oversight of the Ombudsman, and it comes with the FOI process being expanded to the hospital sector.

New Democrats are asking everyone in this chamber, as members of provincial Parliament who represent people in your ridings, to support this motion. It is the right thing to do. It is time that Ontario gets with the

program and catches up with the rest of this country in terms of provincial responsibility and in terms of making sure that the residents of this province get the same kind of oversight, the same kind of accountability and the same kind of transparency as everybody else in this country gets when it comes to their health care dollars.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to rise to talk about this motion. I would start by talking about Bill 89, a bill that I introduced on June 5, 2008, and it reads as follows: An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to hospitals and long-term care facilities. Basically, what this act wants to do is allow the Ombudsman to investigate complaints coming from hospitals or long-term-care facilities.

We all do work in our constituency offices. I'm sure all 107 of us have been faced with a family member who came to see us at our constituency office and talked about a health outcome gone bad, either at a hospital or at a long-term-care home. It is true that every hospital in this province and every long-term-care home has a way to handle complaints, so most of those people who come to see you will have gone through the process at their local hospital, at their local long-term-care home, to try to address their issue.

But if the problem is not solved, they turn to the Ombudsman, because this is a neutral third party who is there to investigate people's complaints. Then, much to their surprise, they find out that the Ombudsman cannot hear their complaints because he is not allowed to investigate complaints coming from hospitals or long-term-care homes. So they go to their MPP's office, and seriously, there's very little else we can do. We can help them along, but the way to help all of those people is to make sure that the Ombudsman, this third-party independent officer, can investigate their complaints.

Most of the complaints that are one-person complaints can be handled by the hospital or the long-term-care facility. But there are systemic complaints that come forward, and this is where the Ombudsman really shines. This is where his office's investigative ability really not only gets to the bottom of what caused the problem, but also brings forward solutions: solutions to make our health care system, our hospitals and our long-term care better. Better care, more accountable: At the end of the day, everybody wins.

I wanted to come back to what happened at Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital—that was referred to by my leader—which was faced with C. difficile. Basically, 62 patients of Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital died from the C. difficile superbug during an extended period of time—it was actually during a period of 20 months—and 115 other people were sick. A total of 264 people died throughout Ontario.

During this period of many months, people complained to the hospital; people complained to the Ombudsman. Much could have been done to change the outcome for family members in months 15, 16, 17 and

20, but the Ombudsman could not do anything. He was not allowed to investigate, so the problem was allowed to continue unchallenged because nobody knew.

You have to realize that when you watch a loved one die of *C. difficile*, it is an extremely undignified way to die. This is as close to “death of a thousand screams” as you have ever seen. People have diarrhea non-stop, and hospital workers do everything they can to help, but there is so little we can do. Prevention is the key, and prevention could have come sooner to hundreds of Ontarians who died from *C. difficile* and other hospital-acquired diseases if we had let the Ombudsman investigate the cases that came forward.

But we don’t have this in Ontario. Every other province, every other jurisdiction in Canada has recognized its value. The hospital association wants Ombudsman oversight because they realize that the Ombudsman is able to investigate systemic issues that will help them in the long run. They realize that for some of the complaints that come in, there is very little that they’re able to do at the local level.

But things could be different in this province; care could be better. At the end of the day, some of those people might not have died had we passed Bill 89, the bill that would have allowed the Ombudsman oversight of hospitals and long-term-care facilities.

There’s an opportunity here today to move this idea forward, and I hope that everybody in this House will realize that it is in the best interests of the people of Ontario, it is in the best interests of the health care providers of Ontario and it is in the best interests of hospital and long-term-care administrators to let the Ombudsman do investigations. It will move us forward and it is the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I’m pleased to speak to this matter. First of all, let me just say that I have read over the motion in detail, and the premise of the motion that cites that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care budget is \$43 billion. It goes on to say elsewhere in the motion that the Ministry of Health transfers \$14 billion to hospitals and \$3 billion to long-term-care facilities. The motion, in effect, says that because of those enormous expenditures and so on, the solution to monitoring or oversight of those expenditures is the Ombudsman. That confuses the role of the Ombudsman and the Auditor General. The Ombudsman’s role is to assist individual citizens with particular complaints arising out of government activities in Ontario. That’s a very specific and a very narrow mandate. On the other hand, the responsibility of the Auditor General is to conduct value-for-money audits, to do financial audits and the like. The mandate of the Auditor General fits in with the premise of the motion dealing with the \$43-billion health budget and all of that sort of thing.

Typically, an Ombudsman is a lawyer who has experience in focusing in on those narrower individual complaints, while the Auditor General, on the other hand—

and this is the situation for our Auditor General here in Ontario—is a very experienced and senior accountant who has a staff of very experienced accountants that he works with. They are specifically trained to do these large, systemic, value-for-money audits, to examine financial statements, to do forensic accounting—all of those sorts of things.

That’s not the skill set that the Ombudsman has. He has another skill set. The Auditor General’s skill set is, as I’ve said, one of an accounting function, and clearly the premise of the opposition day motion is that because of these enormous budget expenditures of the Ministry of Health—almost 50% of the Ontario budget, \$43 billion—you need someone there to keep an eye on that, someone with the skills of an auditor and the auditor’s staff, hence our Auditor General’s staff. Going into the Ministry of Health, the auditor is faced with incredibly complex fiscal arrangements, accounting practices and financial activities. Only the skill set that an Auditor General has would result in any sort of meaningful review.

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We already have an Auditor General in place, a very skilled Auditor General with a very skilled staff. If anybody thinks that our Auditor General is anything less than extremely competent and extremely skilled and if anybody thinks that our Auditor General is going to be put off the track, you just to have witness his report on eHealth. What he did on eHealth was, he dug into the numbers and he did his value-for-money audit. When he wasn’t getting the answers he felt that he should have had, he brought certain pressures to bear. He dug in and he carried out an audit. That’s the very function of the Auditor General; that’s not a function that the Ombudsman is mandated for or trained to effect.

We already have a system in place that achieves the very end that the opposition motion is trying to get to; that is, some sort of oversight of this enormous \$43-billion budget expenditure. If there’s any doubt that the Auditor General is equipped to best deal with the matters that the member from Hamilton Centre has raised in her opposition motion, as I’ve said, you just have to consult the work he has done over the years on any collection of matters.

I sit in the public accounts committee and I have seen with my own eyes, as have the other members of the public accounts committee, the focus, the drive and the competence of the Auditor General. Ontario’s Auditor General is not going to be put off. He will oversee these large budget expenditures. He will do the value-for-money audit. That’s the auditor’s function; it’s not the function of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman’s function is a narrower one: individual complaints from individual citizens in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I’m pleased to join the debate on this motion, which calls for more accountability in our health care system. It’s a timely motion put forward by the NDP, one that arises out of the frustration that

Ontarians feel having watched this government spend us into record deficits while also allowing millions—and, in some cases, a billion—of tax dollars to be siphoned off to untendered contracts to wealthy Liberal consultants.

Just look at the mess at eHealth. Everyone watching this House today remembers it. EHealth is where your taxpayer money goes to die: hundreds of millions of dollars spent and nothing to show for it but some very happy Liberal consultants.

By now, everyone has heard of the eHealth stories: contracting gone wild, expense accounts out of control, and no supervision or responsibility for Premier McGuinty and his crew. With \$1 billion misspent on a network of Liberal friends and insiders, what is needed is a public inquiry to answer the questions the Auditor General couldn't address in the scope of his work, and we need today's motion to pass to provide accountability concerning the government's actions in these areas.

While the auditor suggests that there may have been deliberate collusion and bid-rigging at eHealth, we still don't know the Liberal affiliations of all the individuals involved in the scandal and we don't have any idea which individuals saw personal financial gain—although some must have. All of that falls outside of the mandate of the Auditor General. The only action that can answer those questions is to have a full public inquiry.

An inquiry would also answer the questions that are swirling around other members of the cabinet and their role in this scandal, particularly the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, George Smitherman. We know that Mr. Smitherman was in charge of eHealth for five years as health minister. That amounts to 78%, or \$887 million, of the billion-dollar boondoggle. David Caplan, on the other hand, was only responsible for eHealth for one year as health minister, or 22% of the time, wasting \$240 million. So the guy who was assigned to waste \$887 million got to keep his job, and the guy responsible for wasting \$240 million—well, he gets fired. It doesn't make a lot of sense.

Think of this: We all remember the federal sponsorship scandal and subsequent Gomery inquiry. That Liberal program allowed \$100 million to be flushed down the toilet, with, as we learned, brown envelopes filled with cash passed over the dinner table. In fact, people are in jail today because of that scandal, and yet the McGuinty Liberals allowed \$1 billion to disappear—10 times as much money as was involved in the Gomery inquiry—with no police investigation and no public inquiry to find out how it happened, who was responsible or who gained financially.

The government must restore the public trust and confidence it has to have in order to govern. At eHealth, you have a bunch of Liberal appointees running around the organization like a personal fiefdom: contracts for all of their friends and all of their friends' friends; contracts to consult with each other and read the newspaper on the subway; and permission to send taxpayers the bill for every drink, doughnut and paperclip. What a complete shamble it has proven to be, and what a failure of leader-

ship and oversight to let this go on for months and months while refusing to allow an independent probe into the matter. This, at a time when Ontario families are working longer and harder to meet their basic needs. For them to see this government funnelling hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to consultants through sweetheart deals and untendered contracts is nothing less than a dishonour to taxpayers who contribute their hard-earned wages to the provincial treasury.

The eye-opening facts at eHealth would never have seen the light of day had the Progressive Conservative caucus not filed the freedom-of-information requests for information on the spending habits at these government agencies—and that pertains to today's motion. There's no doubt that the government would have rather swept all of this under the rug, which gives us a compelling reason to support this motion today. The key principle in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is that government information should be available to the public.

The reason we're here today? In Ontario, there are—get this—nearly 630 agencies, boards and commissions that employ, on either a part-time or full-time basis, almost 4,300 people. These bodies range from Agricorp, the crop insurance agency, to the Building Code Commission, the Consent and Capacity Board, Fire Safety Commission, the Lake Simcoe science committee, the Landlord and Tenant Board, and the list goes on and on—all the way to things like the Niagara Parks Commission and through to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

The Ministry of Health oversees one of largest contingents of these agencies, boards and commissions. I counted a total of 103 at this ministry alone. These range from bodies like Cancer Care Ontario to the pharmacy council, the Ontario Mental Health Foundation, and the Transitional Council of the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario. Quite frankly, I'm astonished at how big government has been allowed to get. There's a department, a board, an agency or a special commission for just about everything.

At health, much of the \$40 billion or so that is spent every year on health care in Ontario is now funnelled through 14 local health integration networks, none of which are subject to freedom-of-information laws. That amounts to roughly \$14 billion in spending that doesn't fall under the purview of the freedom-of-information act or any oversight by the Ombudsman. And then there's another \$3 billion or so spent at long-term-care facilities with the same lack of oversight.

We know that the Ombudsman has asked for the authority to review these institutions. On June 17, 2008, he issued a release that said that some of these entities "have become almost a law unto themselves. They have carved themselves a nice, comfortable niche—a zone of immunity against oversight."

In 2007, the Ombudsman was quoted in the Toronto Star as saying, "The government talks a storm about

oversights, supports, checks and balances and so on. But, considering Ontario, especially Toronto, is the economic heart of the country—this is a thriving province—we pride ourselves on setting standards for the country. We do very poorly in independent oversight.”

In my research and innovation critic portfolio we asked for information recently on the spending at Ontario’s centres of excellence, and we were declined since the tens of millions of dollars that taxpayers send to those centres don’t fall under the authority of the freedom-of-information act. So there’s no real way to tell if those arm’s-length bodies are spending their allotted tax dollars in the same way as eHealth chose to spend theirs.

In my colleges and universities critic portfolio, we see much of the same. Universities are not subject to oversight by the Ombudsman. A small handful of universities have their own internal ombudsman, but the majority of them don’t. This is something that I know the Canadian Federation of Students has called for. In fact, they passed a motion that was proposed by the Continuing Education Students’ Association of Ryerson University urging the government to move on this.

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In light of recent revelations of gross misspending at eHealth, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., and many others that I’m sure we haven’t heard of yet, I support this motion, and I urge my colleagues on all sides of the House to do so too. We know that this government has failed miserably in protecting the public purse and the public interest, and so if they won’t do it, as is their job, it’s left to the opposition and the third party to fill the void, because we just can’t trust the government to protect the taxpayer.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I take this issue very personally. You see, my uncle died of C. difficile, and my cousin Linda Del Grande, his daughter—his name is Tony Del Grande—came down to Queen’s Park. She’s not a political person. She was a teacher for all of her life with the Catholic school board. Her father, a beloved member of the family, went into hospital for a simple procedure and then died a terrifying death, a death that you heard our health critic, France Gélinas, describe, oh, too clearly. She had to witness her father die from a hideous death that even a dog owner would not want to see their pet die from.

She phoned me because she knew that I was a member of this Legislature, and she said: “I went to the board of directors of the hospital. They didn’t say anything. They didn’t respond to me. I read about C. difficile in the paper. I put one and one together, and came up with the answer that this is what he died from.” She had a very difficult time even getting a straight answer that this was in fact the diagnosis.

She said, “Who can I complain to? Because clearly, as a concerned citizen and as a loving daughter, I would like

to make it impossible that this would ever happen to anyone else and their loved one, or at least get answers about death of my father.” So she came here, and we had a press conference around this very issue, the deaths that were caused by C. difficile and the difficulty this assembly had in getting to the bottom of the that: how many deaths, where, how they could have been prevented and why they weren’t prevented.

Imagine, if you can, the office of André Marin and the complaints, over 2,000 complaints that that office receives about this exact situation—imagine. Imagine answering the phone to a daughter who has lost a beloved father and having to say, “I’m sorry; I can’t help you. I have no oversight capacity.” And then, when they ask you the next question, of course the next question will be, “Well, who has?” and they say, “Well, the government,” this assembly. We’re the only ones, and we know the track record of governments, and quite frankly any government, of investigating its own.

The member from Willowdale talked about the Auditor General’s role and how the Auditor General should play this role, but that’s absurd. It’s not the Auditor General’s role to respond to the kind of complaint my cousin had. In fact, there’s no way she could have phoned the Auditor General. The Auditor General is put into motion by this assembly, by a committee of this assembly, and we know that on every committee of this assembly, the government has the majority membership. Again, what you’re asking is the government to investigate itself.

No democracy should be sitting with oversight over this kind of sector. We’re talking about all of the MUSH sector but, particularly in terms of this motion that Andrea Horwath, our leader, has put forward today, particularly over the single-largest line item in the budget, and that is health. Certainly the track record of this government, as many members have stood and spoken about, is not conducive to trusting this government to investigate itself, not when you look at the eHealth scandal, but we could continue: the OLG scandal, other scandals—again, outside of the purview of oversight of any sort, really. Only because the press picked up on it, only because FOIs could be done, did this information about eHealth come to light. And even then, the response from the government has been minimal in terms of doing anything about it.

The Progressive Conservatives asked for an inquiry—nothing wrong with that. But what’s really needed here is something long-term and ongoing, and that is the response to all of our constituents: their democratic right, I would put forward, to be able to take a complaint of this order—the death of a loved one—and see it through so that the same thing doesn’t happen to someone else.

We deny that to our citizens—all of them. The question is the one that we heard from Smokey Thomas. We heard the question: What are they hiding? Why won’t they do it? It’s a very simple step, a step that every other province and every other jurisdiction across Canada has made. Every other province has ombudsman oversight of their health care sector except this one. The question really is why. What are they hiding?

From lifting up just one little rock, we saw the eHealth scandal emerge. Imagine if the Ombudsman had oversight over all of the health spending. What would we find then? That's the question.

This does not inspire confidence; it inspires exactly the reverse. And for people like my cousin, who was not politically motivated, who simply wanted an answer about her father's death and couldn't get one, that does not inspire trust in her or anyone who knew my uncle, or anyone who knew anyone who died from C. difficile or any of the other calamities that befall our health care system from time to time.

Where do they go? Who do they ask? The answer in this government is: no one. There is no one to go to and no one to ask, except here, and that's why we brought forward this motion.

For the life of me, I cannot understand why the government has a problem with it. I cannot understand how each one of the members on the opposite side can go back into their constituency offices and actually justify what they do here and justify how they're denying oversight of the largest line item in the budget—and people's lives. It's not just about the money; it's about people's lives. How do they justify that to their constituents?

I'm going to leave some time for others of my colleagues, but suffice to say that I want to dedicate this to the memory of Tony Del Grande and to his family, and to say that, sadly, we're no closer to finding an answer and we're no closer to Ombudsman oversight than we were before that death occurred. I don't sense that we're not going to be any closer until after 2011. I hope that by then we're a lot closer.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I appreciate having a few minutes this afternoon to speak on the motion before us today.

What I intended to do was pick up on a theme that has already been started by our member who spoke first for us on this topic, the member from Willowdale. He was talking about the particular structure of the motion that's before us. I'm sure that all of us here today have taken the time to read it, and if you do read it, I think it speaks to two things: One is the finances, or the amount of money, that is invested and spent on health care in the province of Ontario; and the other is what we can do here in Ontario to make this situation more transparent and more accountable, the implication being that currently it is not.

Where our first speaker, the member from Willowdale, went was where I intended to go on this particular topic as well. They list in their motion the fact that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care currently has an annual budget of \$43 billion. The third paragraph of the motion goes on to speak to the amount of that \$43 billion that goes into the hospital sector, which is \$14 billion. Out of that \$14 billion, \$3 billion goes to long-term-care homes.

Out of this amount of money, we can see that—well, it doesn't really matter what the amount of money would

be, in terms of the totality of it. We know that we spend a tremendous amount of money on health care in the province of Ontario.

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The question very clearly becomes: Who is the best person, who is best positioned, to monitor and ensure that there's transparency and accountability for oversight when it comes to that quantum of resource that's invested by the taxpayers of Ontario?

I don't think there's any debate that can be had or an argument that could be put forward to suggest that the Auditor General is not in fact the very best person to ensure that that money is being spent in the best way possible on behalf of the taxpayers in the province of Ontario. That's exactly what he has done, and he has done that because we've allowed him to do that.

I was listening earlier when the member for the official opposition spoke. He spoke for eight or 10 minutes, and he spoke, I think it's fair to say, a bit passionately in favour of this motion that's before us today from the third party. But it was a bit interesting to sit here and listen to the official opposition speak to being in support of a motion like this and being quite critical insofar as their comments about what our government has done to this point when it comes to transparency and accountability, when it comes to a variety of issues in the province.

The obvious retort back to the members of the official opposition, of course, is that in the very recent history of this province, they had eight years in which they could have done exactly the same thing. They were in government from 1995 to 2003 and, for reasons known only to them, chose not to do this.

It's important to link back to the fact that eHealth did not start with our government. It was called something different. It started under the previous administration, when the Conservatives were the government. I think it began in 2001 or 2002. It was called Smart Systems for Health at that time, before it became eHealth.

So there was an opportunity for the official opposition, had they seen fit, from 1995 to 2003, to invoke multiple layers of transparency when it came to not only the health care budget but a variety of other issues, agencies, boards and commissions, as well as ministries within the province of Ontario, and they chose not to do that. Not only did they choose not to do it; they imposed initiatives and measures that we were bringing in in our time in government.

We brought in FOI ability when it came to Hydro One, OPG, municipal hydroelectric commission utilities, universities and hospitals—those endeavours and measures were opposed by the official opposition. So it was a bit interesting for me to listen to the official opposition speak to this issue, given that they were responsible for perhaps the least transparent act ever undertaken in the province of Ontario, one that went down in history, called the Magna budget. We all remember where that landed, and I think we discovered after the election of our government in 2003 why, in fact, that budget was

presented for the first time in the history of the province outside of the Legislative Assembly.

I think it's important to note a couple of other things when it comes to the eHealth piece in this particular debate today. The Auditor General investigated this very thoroughly—\$43 billion, a significant portion of which is attached to the eHealth piece—and he spoke very clearly in his report: No evidence of political wrongdoing was found during his deliberations.

The Auditor General is an independent officer of this Legislative Assembly. He does not report back to the government; he reports back to the Legislative Assembly. He says and does exactly what he thinks he needs to do on behalf of the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. He came back and said that in his mind, in his and his staff's report, there was no evidence of any political wrongdoing.

As I said, we keep hearing the same theme of \$1 billion being wasted. Of course, that's completely misrepresenting what has happened on this file since 2001 or 2002, when it began. As I said earlier, it began as something that was called Smart Systems for Health under the previous administration, and up till now we've been dealing with it for, I guess, seven or eight years. We know that there are thousands of doctors now online and hundreds of thousands of patients who now have electronic health records. So to suggest and continue to repeat for the people of the province of Ontario that there has been no movement on the file, I think, is a pretty gross misrepresentation.

What we have said very clearly on this side of the House is that the yardsticks should be farther forward at this point than they already are. Everybody who has spoken on this file has said that. The Premier has been very clear on that. Nobody is suggesting that enough good work has been done to this point—and that more needs to be done. I don't think anybody is arguing that. In fact that is why, as a government, we have accepted very clearly, and stated so in this House, all of the recommendations that the Auditor General has put forward.

I want to close—my time is almost up. We're splitting ours here amongst five or six speakers on our side of the House.

I've had the opportunity to deal with issues when it comes to public tendering in a previous life where I worked for about 15 years, where I actually pulled together public tenders. When we did that and put them out—of course, I was not dealing with the amounts of money that we're talking about here, but I would suggest that, for the area where I was working, the amounts of money were significant. We had very clear spending guidelines and rules around how that money could be spent when it came to sole-sourcing, when you had dollar values under which you would need three verbal quotes, and then, beyond that, where you would go to a public tendering process. We followed those rules to the letter. Those rules here need to be followed in our agencies, boards and commissions and in all direct-funded min-

istries as well. Nobody's suggesting anything to the contrary. When those rules are in place and people don't follow those rules, there need to be consequences, and I think we've spoken very clearly to that.

My time is up. I will close by saying that as a government, over the last six years, when it comes to transparency and accountability, we have in fact moved the yardsticks forward, but as the Premier likes to say, there is always more work to be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: You don't know whether to laugh or cry after that last submission with respect to accountability of the McGuinty government. Of course, we are supporting the motion today put forward by the third party, the NDP.

I think a lot of our support is certainly driven by the response of this government to the eHealth scandal, the billion-dollar boondoggle, the fact that so much taxpayers' money was wasted, when this government is now looking at a \$25-billion deficit and we see all sorts of constraints and cutbacks in the health care system across this province.

What have we seen with respect to eHealth? The member talked about transparency. Well, we know what happened when the public accounts committee, which wanted to have an opportunity to talk to the principals very much involved, the key players in the eHealth scandal, Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson. This seems to me to be an eminently reasonable request, that we have those individuals, whose names were prominently featured in the Auditor General's report on eHealth, come before the committee, explain how this all evolved, what their role was, what the role of the government was, the Premier's office, the Minister of Health and other players in the situation. What was the reaction of the government members with respect to that, Madam Speaker? You know, I know and everyone in this Legislature knows: The government majority refused to allow those individuals to appear and explain the roles they played in that enormous loss of tax dollars, \$1 billion.

The other element here, of course, is that they have complete disdain on the Liberal benches across the way for the current Ombudsman, André Marin. You can see it when Mr. Marin's name is raised in this place: the grimaces, the facial expressions, the body language. They do not like this man, and they do not like him because he is so dynamic and gets his teeth into an issue. We saw it with Ontario Lottery and Gaming, what he did there to expose the botch-up in that crown corporation, the fact that an innocent Ontarian was being ripped off. We have to give André Marin a lot of credit for having that ability to go in. He's not intimidated by this government. He's not intimidated by their ministers. He's not driven by their ministers or their backbenchers. He's driven by what's right for this province and what's wrong with an agency of the government and how it's impacting the hard-working taxpayers of this province.

That's the reality. They do not like that. They, in fact, I think in many ways, despise it, and despise the in-

dividual who can use very colourful language, on occasion, to describe what he sees are the failings of this government.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We have interjections here now with respect to this. They just don't like this man. They're afraid of him, and they're afraid to give him the additional authority that other provinces have given to their ombudspersons to go in and look at the health care sector.

They want to interject with inane commentary. We're talking about a mess here, a billion-dollar mess that is in their laps. What do they want to do? They do not want a public inquiry—forget about that—in spite of how, every time it rained when they were sitting in the opposition benches, they wanted a public inquiry. Now we have lost \$1 billion and there's no need for one. They will not even allow a standing committee of this Legislature to talk to the key players involved in this horrible, horrible scandal and horrible, horrible loss of tax dollars.

1650

The backbenchers sit over there mute, or they get up and read their lines prepared by the Premier's office, which is telling them what to say. They're not standing up and fighting for the interests of taxpayers in their ridings or fighting against the health care cutbacks in their ridings—no. They are doing what their masters tell them to do from the corner office. It's shameful.

André Marin was cut from the same piece of cloth as the original Ombudsman in this province, Arthur Maloney. He set the standard, and we have not had an Ombudsman in that office who even approached it up until André Marin. He's doing a terrific job. We should let him go into this area and really shine a light on what's happening in the health care sector. This is the right thing to do. Liberal members should have enough gumption to stand up and do the right thing instead of simply standing up here and echoing what their Premier says they should say. That's all we hear.

The member who got up previously said he was surprised to hear his colleague speak to an issue that he was going to speak to. Give me a break. They have their speaking notes. They have their speaking notes provided by the Premier and they follow them to a T. It's a shameful display.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll start off by saying that it is shocking to me that any government agency receiving taxpayers' money is not subject to significant oversight and how irresponsible it is that the access to information to these agencies is not given.

The largest portion of the provincial budget goes to health care, either directly to the ministry or through it to various agencies, boards and commissions that it has set up to deliver its programs. Although the government claims an arm's-length relationship with its ABCs, it has a direct relationship that should be completely open to public scrutiny and oversight.

The scandals of the past six months have really brought to light this missing link and the need for scrutiny of the spending of our hard-earned tax dollars, and have created grave concern among Ontarians, particularly when they face an increased hit in their tax dollars with this horrible, harmful and hated HST. If this government really wanted to ensure that Ontarians were receiving full value for their tax dollars, they would all be sitting across the floor ready to vote in favour of this NDP motion.

It is clear that the NDP is on the right track with this motion. Even the Ombudsman has called for oversight in these areas. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has followed suit, calling for these various organizations to be subject to freedom-of-information legislation.

It is very clear to me and to many residents of Hamilton and the Niagara region that the Ombudsman's oversight, with the help of appropriate access-to-information legislation, would have been crucial in resolving the flawed competitive bidding process that the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN embarked on a couple of years ago.

When issues like this are raised in the House, the first response from the McGuinty Liberals is that the agencies are arm's-length, so they have no responsibility. Horse feathers. This government uses its majority on all committees to ensure that it moves its agenda. It appoints whomever it wants to these various LHIN boards—and I've read the resumé highlights, folks; they are clearly political appointments—and then it claims no responsibility for the actions of these ABCs. At least with the Ombudsman's oversight, we would have independent action to ensure that these ABCs are implementing this legislation and the regulations and not following a political agenda that is headed up by marching orders.

This government always refers to the Auditor General, who does a good job, but other than the few ABCs that he chooses to audit, his only other audits are directed by the government, not independently. Independent review is the crucial point, and after this summer of shocking financial abuse by this government's hand-picked appointees, it is high time that we enshrined independent Ombudsman oversight and inclusion in freedom-of-information legislation for all government agencies, boards and commissions.

I'd just like to say that they have brought forward 22 agencies that they want to screen. I'd like to inform the House that there are 580 commissions and agencies under this government's control, so what happened to the other 560? Why isn't there oversight on them?

So far, for consultants on the ones we've managed to get to, it's around \$400 million. I think it would be within reason to think that with all those other agencies we'd be into the billions on consultants—absolutely outrageous. I have people coming into my office, single mothers with two kids, with nowhere to go. The social rolls are filled. They can't get into any programs, can't pay their rent and can't put food on the table. Yet we're paying consultants \$1.5 million a day—a day—and that's just what we

know; we don't know about the other 560 agencies and commissions.

I think it would be astronomical, and these things are going to come to light as we move into the next few months. There's more and more coming down the pipe, and I have a feeling that at the end of this, this government—they're all going to be wearing paper bags on their heads in this Legislature after all truth comes out. It's absolutely unbelievable what's going on, and the people of Ontario are not going miss this one, because we're going to make sure they don't.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. David Oraziotti: It's great to have the opportunity to speak to this motion this afternoon, and thank you, Speaker, for that opportunity.

With respect to a number of the comments that were made by members of the opposition, I'm happy to address some of those: first of all, with respect to the issue around what this motion is really talking about, and that is credibility and accountability of really any government in the province of Ontario, to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent wisely, that any government is accountable to the public and that there is oversight.

I don't think any member on either side of this House wants to see any tax dollars spent by the province of Ontario not to be spent wisely and not to be best used in the interests of all Ontarians. That's one of the reasons that our Premier and our government have taken significant steps to open the lines of communication and the oversight and transparency when it comes to many of the crown agencies and organizations in the province.

I know that members opposite had an opportunity while they were in government to bring greater transparency to government and chose not to. The Conservative government chose not to, and the New Democratic Party chose not to when they were in government.

I understand that it's obviously very convenient to talk about these issues today, and our government takes responsibility for the challenges that we face when it comes to oversight and accountability. Obviously, we need to ensure that any crown agency or board that is transferred public tax dollars in this province is held to account.

The auditor, because we're talking about financial accountability here, is probably the best person to be responsible for the oversight of those dollars and will ensure that they're spent wisely. I think we can all learn a lesson from the eHealth circumstance, where our government agreed that the auditor should be looking at the expenses in eHealth. I don't think any member on either side of this House would think that the taxpayer resources that were spent with respect to that particular organization were spent wisely, and we are taking steps to ensure that that does not happen again in any organization, in any crown agency, in any board, because we want to ensure that Ontarians get value for money.

With respect to the health care dollars that are being spent in the province of Ontario at present, I think

members would acknowledge that there has been a very significant increase in expenditures on health care in this province. In 2003, the health care budget was \$29 billion. Today, it's over \$42 billion—a 45% increase in health care spending in the province of Ontario in the last six years.

I heard the member opposite talking about health care cuts. In my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, there have been tremendous investments in health care that our community wants to see: a new hospital, a nurse practitioner clinic, funding for our group health centre, more doctors, more nurses being hired, more funding for home care, more long-term-care beds. Those are very, very important investments that are being made in my community.

1700

I don't want to get into too much of the back-and-forth around the record on health care, because we know what happened when the party opposite was in power: They thought it was a good idea to cut the number of doctors. In stark contrast, we have funded many of those positions, and a new school of medicine in northern Ontario that's having great results in our communities.

I'm very pleased with the results in terms of the expenditures of health care dollars in my riding and my community to address many of the challenges that were overlooked by past governments.

I'm not going to, like members opposite—I'm not going to suggest that there should be any organization, any crown agency or any board that mismanages money in the province of Ontario—and they need to be held accountable.

On this side of House, there should be no illusions about the views that the opposition has about members on this side of the House wanting to ensure that there is accountability and transparency in all organizations across the province of Ontario. That's what members of my community expect. I think that's what members of probably every riding that is represented here in the Legislature want to see take place.

Very recently, the Ontario Hospital Association was talking about greater accountability with resources that are spent in our local hospitals. I have also had those conversations with local representatives in my community.

As well, we know that as of January 1, 2010, Cancer Care Ontario will also fall under the Ontario freedom of information act. That's another important step. Since 2003, more than 80 organizations have been added to the lists that can be subject to freedom-of-information requests. We've also expanded the power of the Auditor General. By 2010, as well, we will post the expenses online for senior management in the OPS as well as cabinet ministers and political staff. I think it's a very positive step to ensure greater accountability and transparency.

Again, members opposite, while in government, had the opportunity to make some of these changes, but those changes were never made.

Sole-sourcing for contracts, a practice that went on during the NDP's time in office and during the

Conservatives' time in office, will not take place any longer in the province of Ontario.

Consultants' bills and the way those are submitted are being changed. The Ontario Integrity Commissioner will be able to more thoroughly review those expenses of consultants as well as agencies and boards under the Ontario government—another important change, a change that the party opposite had the opportunity to make but never made. I'd like to ask the members why that never happened on their watch. It's happening under our government.

There will also be more information posted online—actual expenses, cabinet ministers' expenses—and training for OPS staff around what is a legitimate expense and what can be claimed in the operation of fulfilling their responsibilities as public servants.

So we are taking steps to change the oversight and accountability in the province of Ontario. For too many years those changes did not take place. They're taking place on our watch, and I'm pleased that that's happening.

I'm also concerned around some of the comments that have been made by the opposition with respect to the spending of health care dollars, with respect to—I know, in our community, that electronic medical records at the Group Health Centre have been around for decades, and they have been a tremendous benefit to the people in my community. I know that every effort is being made to make sure that everyone in Ontario has access to their electronic medical records and that they're in a system where we can get them the information they and their caregivers need, in a timely way. I think everybody understands that that's a positive step and we need to do that. Nobody in this House will excuse the behaviour of any organization or crown agency that mismanages taxpayers' money—to getting to that end of what is a very, very positive initiative.

I suppose, to sum up—there are a number of other speakers who want time on this motion. The auditor has the opportunity—and I think is probably the best person, as has been said by a number of my colleagues—to review the finances with respect to various organizations across the province. I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I think it's important to sort of put things in perspective. First of all, I want to commend Andrea Horwath and the NDP for bringing this debate to the House today and, in fact, to the people of Ontario. What is actually going on in almost all sectors of the government today is the concern about H1N1, which is a health issue being very poorly managed. What's going on in the Legislature here is the estimates committee, which is reviewing, program by program, spending of the Ministry of Health. The public accounts committee is dealing with the auditor's scathing report on the scandalous \$1-billion spending. So we are seized with this issue of inappropriate decisions and inappropriate spending of public money and public priorities.

That is the reality. This isn't a partisan comment. This is the reality of an update of where we are on November 3, 2009. And it isn't simply a case of partisanship. It's simply a case of the media today also being seized—on almost every page of every major media and TV outlet—with the mismanagement of health care, the most obvious, of course, being the H1N1 vaccine distribution issue.

That's just a very small part of it, but I think if you look at the editorial written by Andrea Horwath, she brings out a number of points to put this general lack of accountability and transparency right out in the open. She starts out by saying that there are \$42 billion of our budget—that's almost 50% of the total budget—that is going to health care. You have to ask yourself: Is it any better with all that spending? The evidence in my riding, irrespective of what's being said here—in Uxbridge, which is part of my riding, the hospital is near closure. The emergency room isn't even being attended by physicians on a regular basis. The Lakeridge Health board just passed an operating budget with conditions from the ministry, which is short \$13 million. They have a major program reshuffling that is going on thanks to this ministry. What Andrea says here is that we're spending \$3,500 per person—for every man, woman and child—on health care. Are we getting value for money?

The arguments today are clear that we need a full and open public inquiry into health care generally. It all came to bear and became very clear to me when the auditor, an independent officer of the Legislature, said that a billion dollars was basically wasted. It was scandalous, is what he said. They're trying to obfuscate, ignore, avoid and placate any of those observations. They want to blame Stephen Harper; they want to blame the Bob Rae government; they want to blame governments of 10 years ago; they want to blame Sir John A. Macdonald for everything that goes wrong.

I cannot believe, when you look at this budget—and the concluding remark by Andrea Horwath I think is very important. But let's keep our eye on the ball here. The auditor and all of the media looking into this say that the scandal continues. This is an article on November 3, and this is after the auditor's report of a billion dollars being basically unaccounted for. I have a list of all those expenditures here, if you want it, published by the media. They aren't political documents here. This one here is by the Toronto Star, which is the Liberal briefing note, and it says that \$236 million went into eHealth amid the scandal. After the auditor's report, they're still out of control.

The Premier doesn't seem to get it. Unfortunately—he's a nice man—it has gone beyond him. I think it's being run by Sarah Kramer or someone. This article goes on to say—and I have to give the member from Nickel Belt full marks for uncovering this scandal—that the government has allowed an extension of a system to 5,700 physicians out of the 23,000 in the province, at a cost of a quarter of a billion dollars. This goes on to say a fully integrated system this is not. This is still in a pilot phase, a trial stage.

If you look at some of the comments made in the articles that I've been looking at in preparation for this, the general comment is that this spending in eHealth has had no real consistency in value. The member from Sault Ste. Marie said that in his hospital and the northern medical school—the northern medical school was commissioned when we were in government. You got to cut the ribbon.

1710

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: As far as I'm concerned, that means that they're not willing to admit what happened—they're the only ones who can do good.

Let's review where we are: This Legislature is seized by the troubling lack of leadership, lack of planning, gross expenditures, and the auditor and all the committees are talking about it. I can only say this to you: The spending goes on, according to an article this morning. What are you going to do?

I think our member from Leeds–Grenville was very reasonable—but he was passionate, of course—when he was suggesting that we have a full public inquiry. This is the most important service that the province of Ontario spends on. We're laying off nurses, and we spent a billion dollars on a systems solution that isn't working. What does that tell you? You can blame whoever you want. The reality is, none of the doctors are connected, none of the hospitals are connected, none of the clinics, labs, long-term care—and the LHINs aren't connected. Some are; some aren't. It's not working—it's not working.

I can tell you that there are articles here that I have today that say that Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson knew that—they knew it. And they were on a spending spree. Imagine, this is the tip of the iceberg. I have a very few minutes to speak. In her opening speech and address to her peers, the person that wrote the speech—it cost \$25,000. You could have hired a PSW to take care of an elderly person for a year—for one speech made at Banff, at some fancy hotel that probably cost another \$5,000. There's no respect for taxpayers' money, and at the end of the day they're waiting in the rain to get a needle for a pandemic.

This certainly, at the very least, needs a full public inquiry, not just in respect to the auditor's work, where he was barred from some of the information—there were barriers put up so he could not get at some of the data. I can tell you right now that even the Premier and the minister this morning, when asked about the plan to deal with these frail elderly and others who could be subject to, dare I say it, even death—so I commend the NDP for bringing this opposition day motion on a topic that is near and dear to every man, woman and child.

And it isn't just about H1N1; it's about a lack of a plan, a minister who has resigned and a deficit of \$25 billion. I can tell you now that the evidence is just a start. I think if we dig deeper, we'll find it even more troubling.

I asked a question of the Minister of Government Services today, just a simple question: Where did the

\$190 million on the technology review from the Ministry of Government Services go? What I got was blaming some other government for some other problem and no answer. Clearly we've got to clear the air for the good of all the people of Ontario. Put the partisan politics aside and agree with this opposition day motion today, as we will, with our leader, Tim Hudak, leading the parade. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to speak on the motion brought by the third party. I heard so many speeches before and I listened to many speakers speak about this issue. I think it was a shame when many members stood up in their places and attacked health care in the province of Ontario. My colleague and I just came from the estimates committee, where we were listening to the Minister of Health, to the good things our government and our ministry are doing for the people of Ontario and how we paid a lot of attention to many different details of health care and how much the people of Ontario get in service in this province.

No doubt about it, when you do a lot, sometimes you make a mistake. Mr. O'Toole, we're not blaming anyone, not Sir John A. Macdonald, or blaming you, Mr. John O'Toole, or your government in the past or many others who are standing in their place and attacking health care at the same time the people of Ontario gather themselves to deal with many different issues concerning their health.

So no doubt about it, every member of this House wants to protect taxpayers, wants to see the investment go directly to the people of Ontario. Every tax dollar should be utilized, should be used to benefit the people of this province.

I've had the chance many different times to visit hospitals and care centres in Ontario. I saw determined people committed to health care in the province of Ontario. In the meantime, the people in the opposition, the members of the opposition, stand in their place and accuse us, the backbenchers, saying that we don't care about health care. They think we are standing up just to read the message of the government; as a matter of fact, we're standing up in our place to defend health care, which everyone in this province benefits from, and our constituents in this province, in all the ridings, 107 ridings across the province of Ontario, who get benefits from health care on a daily basis.

We believe strongly in accountability and transparency. That's why our government opened more than 80 agencies and subjected them to auditing. We believe strongly that every hospital, every agency, every university, every college—every agency that belongs to the government of Ontario, every agency that receives taxpayers' dollars—should be subject to auditing. But we have to work together as the people who got elected to this place to see what's the best way, the best avenue to use in order to protect taxpayer dollars.

People are talking about the eHealth record, the H1N1 pandemic which we face in the province of Ontario. We

see how the minister is working very hard with our government to make sure all of the people in this province—all of the kids, all of the vulnerable people—receive the vaccination at the right time and the right place. That's why we should work together, all of us, on both sides of the House, to assist the Minister of Health, to assist this government, to assist our health care providers in the province to make sure that everyone receives the health care they need without any doubt, without any problems, because if we stand in our places, especially in this place, raise concerns and also raise flags about many different issues, we're going to scare the people of Ontario, we're going to scare our constituents. It's our job to make sure all the people calm down and deal with this pandemic in the right way, in a professional way, instead of scaring the people of this province.

I listened to the opposition speaking about health care. We listen to them attacking our health care, doubting our ability as a province to deliver good public health care, and to make this health care public and accessible for all people.

Mr. Paul Miller: We're doubting you.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We listened carefully to the opposition many different times. We listened to them and we saw them when they were in government and what they did to health care. The Conservative Party—

Interjections.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: They closed a lot of hospitals, they fired a lot of nurses, they fired a lot of doctors, they closed off the clinics. In the meantime, we've opened a lot of hospitals and we've hired 8,000 nurses. We expanded our health care, and we listed so many different vaccinations and services for the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Madam Speaker, we expanded our investment from \$28 billion to \$40 billion. We're trying to modernize and transform health care in a way and in a fashion that supports all the people.

In the morning, my colleague asked the Minister of Health a very important question about the aging strategy—how we can keep our elderly people at their home. He gave examples from his house of his mother, when she received the best care possible, not just in Canada but in the world. They gave her the chance to walk again, to go out and shop, and also to visit her friends and family. This is the health care all of us are trying to support and maintain in the province of Ontario—not the members from the opposition, who are standing in their place scaring the people of Ontario, doubting our ability, doubting our health care. I think if they're honourable and they understand the future of this province, the people of Ontario paying taxes and their capacity and their skills to maintain that health care, they should stand up in their place and support the minister, support our direction, and support the people who work very hard to provide the tax dollars to be invested in health care, hospitals, daycares and in long-term-care facilities. It's our obligation and duty as citizens of this province to continue serving those people and to make

health care public and accessible for all, despite all the concerns, despite all the troubles. We have a Premier, we have a government and we have a minister who care about the people of Ontario, who care about taxpayer dollars, who care about how we can manage health care and how we can make it efficient, transparent and accountable, and how we can allow the people of this province to benefit from this investment and extend it to reach every corner, every inch, of the province of Ontario.

1720

That's why I'm voting against this motion that was brought by the third party. It does not make sense; it does not serve us in the province of Ontario.

I commend all my colleagues who spoke before me because they said the right things in order to protect health care, in order to create a comfort zone for the people who listen to us in this place.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak and support my colleagues, support our government and support our minister.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: We have just heard a great deal about standing in one's place and working together, and I'm very pleased to stand in my place and am more than willing to work together with respect to this motion that has been presented by the third party. I say that because I fully support the tone and the intention of this motion. I say that in the context of the \$1-billion eHealth boondoggle that we've been discussing for the last number of weeks, and along with that, of course, the related mismanagement that is coming to light. I regret the fact that in the future, there will probably be a lot more information brought forward in spite of the efforts of this government to suppress it and to keep it secret.

So there is a need and we see a demand, if you will, in this motion calling for oversight. I'll read the motion: "The government of Ontario should act immediately to ensure that all Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care transfer payment agencies, LHINs and all MOHLTC-funded agencies, boards and commissions are subject to Ombudsman oversight and are covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act."

I would like to talk a little bit about the work of the Ombudsman—not only the Ombudsman, but also the Integrity Commissioner. We know this Premier has turned to the Integrity Commissioner to take a look at the expenses of 21 agencies in the province of Ontario, including eHealth. There's another one in there as well; it will come to me in a second.

Again, I can agree with the nature of this motion, the tone. It's a motion designed to go partway to end the current level of costly incompetence based on entitlement when it comes to the spending of our health care dollars, and in part—in my view, anyway—to bring an end to the secrecy and the backroom deals with people's money.

However, while I agree wholeheartedly with that goal, I often wonder, as we hear calls to bring in the Auditor General or the Integrity Commissioner or the Ombudsman to oversee this scandal-plagued government,

whatever happened to the concept of responsible government? Whatever happened to ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Jim Wilson: They've never heard of it.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Why have they not heard of this? This is a concept that has been prevalent in the province of Ontario, and before that, Upper Canada, for at least 150 years.

This motion also states: "The Auditor General in his report on the electronic health initiative explicitly said, 'Throughout the years, oversight of the EHR initiative has not been effective.'" It's a very good point, and it's a key piece of reasoning to suggest the need for further oversight.

I do wish to continue to talk a bit about responsible government, a concept that eludes this present regime. Again, I'd like to think that when our forefathers set up responsible government in what was then Upper Canada, they did not envision the need to call forward oversight agents like the Ombudsman or the Attorney General or the Integrity Commissioner, an office that was just invented in the late 1960s.

The whole idea of responsible government was for government to be in itself responsible, to be accountable and to provide the oversight necessary to ensure taxpayer-funded programs did not go off the rails and into the ditch. If we go back 150 years, commencing with the reign of Robert Baldwin, co-Premier of the day, it was customary, it was really the concept of the day to expect a level of responsibility, not to mention competence, for government ministers. If we take a look at our history books, we find the "responsible" part of responsible government refers to "a system of government that embodies the principle of parliamentary accountability," the foundation of the British system, the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy.

So responsibility, accountability: concepts that, I feel, if we paid a little more attention to, we wouldn't need to be debating some of these points requiring yet another level of oversight when the first level, the primary level, is not present, oversight with respect to yet another and another expenditure of taxpayer dollars to ensure government is doing the right thing, the thing that it was expected to do in the first place. Now, in Baldwin's time—and this is back in the 1850s—the adherence to the concepts of responsibility and accountability was such that it was considered the right thing to do to resign. If leadership was called into serious question or if there was a major scandal that occurred under one's watch, one immediately stepped down. Robert Baldwin himself, under this responsible system of government that seems to be fading away—the system that he initiated, that he championed—stepped aside a number of times rather than compromise his values, his character or ultimately even come close to compromising his honour. Again, while Baldwin's example goes back some 150 years, these concepts of accountability and responsibility must remain.

As a member of this Legislature—I've been here 14 years—I've become familiar, and I've mentioned this

before, with the bronze plaque. It's placed on the wall at the east wing of the Legislative Assembly. It commemorates Robert Baldwin and commemorates his contribution. I suggest that the Premier, this cabinet and all government members present—they have to go by that bronze plaque when they walk into the east wing—take a look at the inscription. It's titled, "Robert Baldwin, 1804-1858," and it reads, "Born in Toronto, Baldwin devoted his entire career to a single cause. As a member of the assembly, as executive councillor, as Solicitor General, and as co-Premier, he remained true to his vision until the second Baldwin-LaFontaine administration established the principle of responsible government in Canada."

In his quest to not only establish but to reinforce the concept of responsible government, Baldwin resigned a number of times rather than compromise his values, his character and ultimately his honour.

I can't help but wonder how Robert Baldwin would have reacted to the lack of not only government accountability but cabinet responsibility that has become the hallmark of this present regime in Ontario. We have a situation today with a complete lack of responsibility and to date only one government minister, Minister Caplan, accepting the price of accountability for programs that went wrong when he was on the watch of that particular ministry. I cannot help but wonder why we're left to call in third party oversight agents.

1730

Why is it necessary to be forced into a position of calling in an Ombudsman with respect to these attempts to rein in uncontrolled spending and mismanagement? We've seen the Auditor General called in a number of times, of course, and even the Integrity Commissioner is being asked to do double duty by the present Premier with respect to the expenses of 21 agencies, including the eHealth organization. I regret this loss of really what it means to be responsible, to be accountable, to oversee.

I've got a great deal of respect for the Ombudsman. I think of his report on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; that's an excellent read. Many have read his report on the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. The Ombudsman has a role to investigate complaints about services provided not only by the government itself but its organizations. I'm concerned about his ability to do that part of his job if we are adding the broader oversight function of all of the province's health spending, for example.

Similarly, when we take a look at the Office of the Auditor General, again, a position to assist the Legislature in holding the government and its administrators accountable for the administrative stewardship of public funds and the achievement of value for money in government and public sector operations—again, to assist with respect to responsibility and accountability—in my view, the primary responsibility lies with a cabinet minister. That's where the buck stops.

The Integrity Commissioner has been mentioned to take on a broader role. It's an office that was established in 1989. It reflected the need to maintain the high standards of ethical conduct in the public service, again

without unduly inhibiting people of outstanding ability in the private sector who may be interested in public service. The Integrity Commissioner does good work, as we know—as do the Auditor General and the Ombudsman—but it doesn't take the place of the responsibility and the accountability that lie solely within the function and the role of a cabinet minister, a Prime Minister or a Premier of the crown.

As I think about the obvious need now for renewed responsibility in our cabinet ministers and our cabinet committees, I wonder as well if the government would be behaving so cavalierly if my private member's bill on recall had made its way through third reading. Those who were here at this time will perhaps remember the Recall Act, 2004—proposed legislation building on recall provisions put in place in a number of states and provinces across North America. Fifteen states in the United States employ recall not only for elected state officials but also elected local officials. Half of these jurisdictions adopted recall well before the First World War. In the case of the Recall Act, 2004, any elected member would have been recallable for conduct unbecoming a member after a year in office, and a Premier would have been subject to a province-wide recall process in which all of the qualified voters in the province would have an opportunity to participate. As you may recall, this proposed legislation for recall, when I introduced this and during the debate, I actually felt about as popular in this House as a snake at a garden party. It didn't go over well with the government members. However, if recall legislation had been instituted in Ontario, I feel this culture of entitlement that underlines many of the McGuinty government's scandal-plagued recent years would never have been allowed to grow, would never have been allowed to fester in the place.

That said, we do not have recall legislation in the province of Ontario, as we see in a number of other jurisdictions—British Columbia, for example; California would be a well-known example. The Liberal government members voted that down quite decisively and, in the context of what has occurred over the last several years, I think I can understand why.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to enter the debate. One of the things that I want to get on the record, and then I'll speak specifically to the motion: We've had it acknowledged by both sides of the House, the third party and the official opposition, that in fact there is more money that is going into the health care system since we took government in 2003, and that has been reinforced by a number of speakers on both sides of the House.

So now, when we talk about the investments that have been made in health care, we have agreement in the House that in fact there have been solid investments in health care. So then we go to accountability and transparency and what we have done as a government to improve accountability and transparency.

Before I get to that, I want to go back a couple of years and talk about when I was first elected. When I was

first elected, at that time the third party was in government. They were introducing a piece of legislation that was called Bill 160. Bill 160 was specifically targeted toward long-term-care homes. I can tell you that we met with all of the long-term-care homes in the county that I represented—Huron county—to work our way through Bill 160. I can tell you that that was not about making health care better, stronger or more investments being made in long-term care. And that certainly was shared with the government at that time.

The other thing that was happening at that time, as well, was a 13% reduction in medical spots for the schools. We know that doctors are the gatekeepers of our health care system. That's where you access it; that's where you go in. This is how you access your primary care. You cut it 13% and you know eight, nine years down the road you've got a big problem, and then it starts compounding.

Then the next government comes in. I want to share a little story, because we've heard a lot. We've heard people stand up—they remember a time when they were in government. They remember a time; they have rose-coloured glasses on about that time. That time was so fine that Robert Baldwin was quoted. They don't talk about the Magna budget. So I wonder, was that member in the House? Was that member bringing forward his recall private member's bill when he was in government for eight years? I don't think so. I think that he waited until he was in opposition, then he brought it forward.

I digress for just one minute. I want to talk about a story. As you know, I was the head of the town of Clinton. That government voted to close our local hospital. I can tell you, if any of them have never stood in a room in their local hospital and found out that a government has closed their hospital, then they have not walked a day in the community of Clinton. Fire barrels then came on the main street. We had people coming in by the hundreds. It was a very traumatic time: nurses called as old fashioned as hula hoops. They have rose-coloured glasses on if they remember that time.

The reality is that health care has evolved. The reality is that there are more family doctors. The reality, as supported by both sides of the House, is that there are stronger investments today by the McGuinty government in health care in many facets, and I can speak specifically in my riding to the long-term-care homes.

1740

Laughter.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound laughs. I don't think he's laughing, because we heard his statement.

We look at the Bluewater redevelopment of my long-term-care home. That was the prototype for rural areas. And I see things that are happening in rural Ontario. Family health teams—this is a team approach. You know, 58,000 people now have access to primary care in my riding; 7,602 people who were orphan patients are now off the list.

When we talk about hospitals—specifically targeted by this motion for the Ombudsman—hospitals in rural

Ontario and across the province rely a lot on the goodwill of the community and the investments they've made. One of the things we did as a government was bring in accountability agreements, which, I would add, they both voted against, but here we are today talking about bringing in another level of bureaucracy.

Our government has been consistent in the accountability and the transparency. But when we talk about hospitals, we know that Tom Closson, who is the head of the Ontario Hospital Association, knows that you need the community's confidence and their trust. He's willing to work on further transparency and accountability, as they always have been, because they also rely on the communities to provide the services. It's a true partnership. That's what the previous governments never got: the sense of community that is needed in order to provide health care that is respectful of the communities in getting their needs addressed.

So when I see a motion like this coming forward, talking about putting in another layer—what in fact does it do? Does it increase the transparency? I would argue that what we have in place with the Auditor General—and we also have accountability agreements, we have LHINs that work on the actual planning.

We can do freedom of information in such a wider scope today than when we took over government, and one side—not both sides—the official opposition has consistently voted against transparency. So when I see members stand in the House and talk about Baldwin very respectfully, in a manner that took a lot of research, and then knowing that that member supported their government, which, by the end, wasn't even holding their budget in this House—so I can understand why something, when they were in government, wasn't supported.

But you can rest assured, on this side of the House, we began and we will continue to build the accountability and transparency in the system. The Auditor General's recommendations will all be implemented on eHealth. And, Speaker, when I have another opportunity, I will give a very long speech on eHealth.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I, with pleasure, rise in order to support this motion. The motion, simply put, allows the Ombudsman of Ontario to do the work that they should be able to do when it comes to giving rise to complaints that people may have about hospitals and other institutions out there that are related to the health care field.

We all know in our constituencies that, from time to time, there are some complaints that are made to our constituency offices about some service that wasn't properly administered or some issue that the public is upset about, and there is really no recourse other than complaining to the hospital administration and/or the hospital board. In some cases, those hospitals have their own ombudsman, but that's the point: It's their own ombudsman. It's not the independent Ombudsman of the province of Ontario. So we're asking through this motion to give the Ombudsman of Ontario the ability to take on

investigations in those areas that he currently is not able to do by limit of his mandate.

But the other part, which is probably just as important, if not more, is the issue of FOI. For those people who are watching and wondering what that is, that's a freedom-of-information request. Currently, if you want to find out about some ministry decision that has been happening or some of the agencies that are covered under FOI, you have the right as a citizen or as a member of this assembly, if you want, to FOI information from the ministry on a decision that you may have some questions about. So you may ask for details having to do with financial information or why certain decisions were made, what some of the facts and some of the details were to that decision, and then what happens is that you get a letter back saying, "That will comprise 400 or 500 documents, and we are going to charge you X amount of dollars." If you pay that, you get that information and you are able to review it. Of course, they are going to protect the privacy of individuals, but you are going to get the basic information by way of FOI.

You don't have that ability with hospitals and other MUSH sector organizations in the health care field, and it is a real problem because we know, for example, given what happened with eHealth, that there are a lot of questions to be asked when it comes to how the government spent a billion dollars and ended up in a situation of really not getting any results for that billion-dollar expenditure in the end. Do people agree that we should have electronic records? Absolutely. I don't think anybody in this House disagrees. But a billion dollars, with sole-source contracts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to friends of Liberal organizers and others who basically got business from the government to go out and print money? There were contracts in the neighbourhood, we found out—it was Madame Gélinas who raised a particular issue in regard to how many doctors—five thousand or 3,000?

Mr. Michael Prue: It was 5,700.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So 5,700 doctors are going to be getting \$30,000 in order to sign up at eHealth, but when you add up the numbers, there's a \$60-million gap. So you ask yourself—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: How much?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sixty-five.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A \$65-million gap.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: That's a big dinner at Barberian's.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's a big dinner at Barberian's, if it was still open. Imagine. Where has that \$65 million gone? It might be quite legitimate, but the public should have the right to FOI that information and find out: Did a contractor make that profit of \$65 million for taking on this particular task? Are the doctors actually getting more than the \$30,000 per doctor? Is there something that we're not aware of and that we need to be made aware of so that we're clear as to what has been spent, where the money has been spent, and have some clarity in that whole process? In this day and age, \$65 million is a

whole lot of money, and it would do a lot to make sure that services remain in your community where they're being shut down.

Therefore, we will be supporting this motion and asking everybody else to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed to the motion will 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 (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 3.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Hampton, Howard	Murdoch, Bill	
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those opposed, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gerretsen, John	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Jaczek, Helena	Pendergast, Leeanna
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Qadri, Shafiq
Brownell, Jim	Johnson, Rick	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Carroll, Aileen	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	McNeely, Phil	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 22; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

TOXICS REDUCTION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand-Norfolk has given notice of

dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of the Environment.

The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yesterday, I did ask a question of the Minister of the Environment to which the minister claimed to have no knowledge of the details which I referenced, so for purposes of background, I'm quoting the minister on that one. I'd like to read part of my questions and part of the minister's answers into the record so that we're all on the same page here.

In my question, I asked, "Can you explain to this House why on earth you're forcing the food and the feed industry to report as toxic products things like Ontario-grown wheat, soybeans, as well as malted barley, chocolate, sugar and other baking ingredients? These products aren't toxic. Why would you do this, Minister?" That's on the record.

I'll just scan down to the minister's response. He stated, "I would be more than pleased to meet with the member on these particular issues that he's talking about. I'm not familiar with the exact details as to why those particular materials would be excluded..."

I had a supplementary and I queried, referring to the food and feed industry, "What do they tell consumers who learn that the products containing common food-based ingredients are, in the eyes of this government, stigmatized as toxic? This will be a public relations nightmare for the industry." And then I specifically asked, "Will you exempt the feed and food production companies from reporting as toxic the most basic of food ingredients?"

The minister stated that "there are no food ingredients on the list. So I don't know exactly what this member is talking about..."

"That's what this is all about, and we are not including any food ingredients on the draft list."

That's what went on yesterday. With these words fresh in our minds, I'd like to take a minute to explain to the minister the details of my query; I don't know whether he has been briefed in the interim. As well, I seek an answer with respect to the minister's intention regarding exemptions for food and feed production from reporting as toxic, again, the most basic of food ingredients. While the minister stated, "We are not including any food ingredients on the draft list," he knows, or should know by now, that upon further examination, this is not the case.

While he and the ministry can play word games and contend that a word, "flour" for example, is not listed on the toxic substance list, the fact is that particulate matter is to be reported by companies as toxic. In turn, flour, as well as other powder-like ingredients—chocolate, for example—can be ground up into particulate matter. That's really what I'm driving at: While food may not be listed on the toxic regulations, particulate matter is listed—you don't deny that—and when it comes down to it, the particulate matter is the food. The particulate matter is the flour, if I go back to that example.

The ministry can't say that particulate matter is toxic without also saying that that particular food product is toxic, because the particulate matter and the food are the same thing. It makes no sense for the ministry to suggest that anyone, especially consumers, make a distinction between food particulate matter and the food itself. Again, I suggest that the minister hasn't even considered the impact and the stigmatization this will have on the Ontario food and feed industry and, by extension, Ontario farmers. Maybe he doesn't care; I don't know.

Clearly, food processors outside of our borders will not receive the same toxic treatment. In fact, this is just one more impediment—it creates an unlevel playing field—with respect to doing business in this province.

Again, I'd ask the minister to rescind this backward-thinking proposition and exempt the food industry from reporting requirements.

Further, the minister's suggestion that he didn't know what I was talking about seems highly questionable, given that his staff met with food industry reps. The member for Oxford raised this in the House and described the negative impact that would happen, then he read the October 9 article by Christina Blizzard titled, "Province's New Rules Bite Producers Who"—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me be absolutely clear that food ingredients like chocolate, wheat, barley and soybeans are not on Ontario's proposed list of substances. Ontario's proposed list of substances is based on the federal National Pollutant Release Inventory, the NPRI, which includes substances that are known to be harmful to the environment or to human health, including a number of carcinogens. They are also included on the federal CEPA toxic list as well as on the US federal Toxics Release Inventory.

So let's be absolutely clear: The list that I have here, and I'd be more than pleased to send it over to the member, does not include food ingredients. It does include particulate matter.

As we well know, certain manufacturing processes, such as the milling and grinding of grains or the smoking of meats, produce substances known as particulate matter, which are known to be harmful to human health and the environment. In this case, it's not the type of particulates that are harmful, but it's the size that creates the problem, and the member well knows that. He knows that regardless of the source, particulate matter is a key component in the formation of smog, which contributes to over 9,000 premature deaths in Ontario each and every year.

In addition, some additives, preserves and food dyes are on Ontario's proposed list of substances. While provincial and federal legislation permits certain uses of these substances at specific levels, we are proposing to require manufacturers, including food and feed processors, to consider options to reduce their use or creation of these substances where possible or when safer

alternatives exist. That's really what our toxics reduction law is all about.

Draft regulations will not compromise existing food safety laws and guidelines. In fact, the agriculture sector is exempt. Reporting on these substances is not new for manufacturers. In fact, food manufacturers already report to the federal government and to the public, on their releases, over 20 substances, including particulate matter.

Ontario, as we well know, with this act is taking an innovative approach, one which focuses on inputs, reducing toxic substances at the beginning of the industrial process. This has proven in other jurisdictions to be an effective way of encouraging facilities to use or create less of these substances or, if possible, use a safer alternative.

Under this approach, facilities are required to track and quantify the toxic substances used or created at the facility, as well as to undertake toxic substance reduction planning. While planning is mandatory, implementation of the plans, as the member well knows, is voluntary. That builds on but does not duplicate the existing federal need to report to the National Pollutant Release Inventory.

Some of Ontario's leading manufacturers have demonstrated that investments to reduce toxics can result in increased competitive advantage, creating new business opportunities and reducing risks. This approach is protective of human health and the environment while supporting the transformation of businesses in Ontario to the new green economy. In fact, the government is investing, of our tax dollars, over \$24 million to help support industry for green chemistry alternatives and to reduce the use of toxics in operations, including grants for small businesses, site-specific technical assistance from experts, and the training and accreditation of toxic reduction planners.

My ministry has been happy to meet with many of the individual stakeholders. I've met with a number as well. I might just indicate to you what the result has been in Washington state, which has a similar law to what we're proposing here. Let me just report directly from the Toxic Reduction Advisory Committee that they set up to find out what happened after 20 years.

Almost 20 years ago, the state Legislature established a pollution prevention program similar to this to eliminate or reduce hazardous waste and hazardous substances. The businesses that implemented the plans reported a reduction in hazardous waste generation and hazardous substance use of over 200 million pounds. Financial savings from these reductions have saved businesses an estimated \$400 million.

That's been the experience in Washington state. Undoubtedly, we will have the same experience here, and the environment and all of us will be the better for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1813.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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
Hoskins, Eric (LIB) Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	St. Paul's Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB) Jeffrey, Linda (LIB) Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP) Kular, Kuldip (LIB) Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB) Leal, Jeff (LIB) Levac, Dave (LIB) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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McNeely, Phil (LIB) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB) Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Huron–Bruce Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

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Smitherman, Hon. / L’hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l’Énergie et de l’Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
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Takhar, Hon. / L’hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l’Assemblée
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Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l’opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Jim Brownell, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Khalil Ramal
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Eric Hoskins, Pat Hoy
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Helena Jaczek, Kuldip Kular
Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, Reza Moridi
David Oraziatti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
Yasir Naqvi, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Khalil Ramal
Bas Balkissoon, Jim Brownell
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Khalil Ramal
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Arnott
Ted Arnott, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Jerry J. Ouellette
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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