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Tuesday 16 February 2010

Mardi 16 février 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 16 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 16 février 2010

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.

BY-ELECTION IN LEEDS–GRENVILLE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, during the recess, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House for the electoral district of Leeds–Grenville by reason of the appointment of Robert W. Runciman to the Senate of Canada, effective the 29th day of January, 2010. Accordingly, my warrant has been issued to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

BY-ELECTION IN OTTAWA WEST– NEPEAN

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the house that, during the recess, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Jim Watson as the member for the electoral district of Ottawa West–Nepean, effective the first day of February, 2010. Accordingly, my warrant has been issued to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

BY-ELECTION IN TORONTO CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, during the recess, a vacancy occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of George Smitherman as the member for the electoral district of Toronto Centre, effective the third day of January, 2010. Accordingly, my warrant was issued to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENERGY CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 10, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 235, An

Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate this morning.

If I could begin by just taking a moment in this House to convey my congratulations to my former colleague, now a member of the Senate of Canada, the Honourable Bob Runciman. I'm certainly more than ecstatic that the Prime Minister chose Bob Runciman to represent this country in the Senate of Canada at this time, and I wish him, his wife, Jeannette, and his family all the best on this exciting new phase in his life. I'm looking forward to his good work continuing in the Senate, as he did for 29 years in this House as well. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for that opportunity.

This morning, we're returning to second reading debate on Bill 235, an act respecting energy retailers: An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009 and to amend other Acts.

It's kind of passing strange the way this bill got here. You see, well over a year ago, the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, Mr. Ramsay, introduced a private member's bill that had great support in the industry, and particularly from the Ontario Energy Association. The president of the OEA at that time, Shane Pospisil, who, as you know, Madam Speaker—we've just switched from Mister to Madam; we make that transition so quietly sometimes. Madam Speaker, as you will recall, as the president of the OEA, Mr. Pospisil was very active in trying to effect change in the energy retailing sector and was looking for ways to ensure that the sector was viable but also brought about something that was absolutely necessary, and that was better consumer protection to that sector. Now, Madam Speaker, you will recall that Mr. Pospisil was an assistant deputy minister to the Minister of Energy during the term of this government, so he had a great deal of experience on both sides of the issues—not only as the president and CEO of the Ontario Energy Association, but previously as the assistant deputy minister to Mr. Duncan on his first foray as energy minister.

I know it has been kind of a revolving door—energy ministers in this province. So it was George Smitherman, the former member for Toronto Centre and former Minister of Energy, who talked about bringing in legislation dealing with the energy retailers' side of the business but never actually did it. But that was not uncommon for George. He did a lot of talking but a lot less doing some-

times, unless it was something that he felt would further his interest in trying to be mayor of Toronto, which—so many of the things that are happening in the energy sector today were actually brought in because George knew they would be skewed as being very positive in the city of Toronto and help him along with his quest to be mayor.

What I am surprised with, quite frankly, is that the Premier is actually so complicit in this, in allowing the energy sector still to be used as George's private domain to put forth his own agenda and promote his own cause. But it has been a kind of revolving door in the ministry. I know that right now, this week, Brad Duguid is the Minister of Energy. We're not sure what will come next week, because our good friend, and a fine gentleman he is, Gerry Phillips briefly became the energy minister for the second time to fill a void, to fill a gap, with the resignation of George Smitherman. Of course, today, Brad Duguid is the one taking orders from the Premier's office as to what to do in the energy sector to make sure that the political stuff is being taken care of; not necessarily the needs of the energy sector, or the needs of the industry, or the needs of the consumers, but that the political needs of, particularly, George Smitherman and other members of the Liberal Party are being well served by the orders from the Premier's office to the Minister of Energy.

So we are curious as to what might happen next week. Will we have a new energy minister? We don't know that. We can't predict that, just as we couldn't necessarily have predicted Mr. Bilodeau's gold medal on Sunday in mogul skiing. Congratulations—Canada's first gold medal ever achieved on Canadian soil at the Olympics. So, Pierre Bilodeau, thank you very much—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Alexandre Bilodeau.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Alexandre Bilodeau, congratulations. Thank you very much.

That's why Ted is here; he's here to correct me, and it's wonderful to have him nearby because he'll always make sure that I'm getting the facts straight.

But congratulations; it was a great day for him and a great day for Canada. Everyone who was watching there Sunday was exceedingly and justifiably proud.

But just as that isn't easy to predict, it's not easy to predict where this government is going in the energy sector. One thing is certain: Look at the politics of the issue, and that's exactly where they'll be heading. They'll be heading down that road of what they can do to politically advance their cause, not necessarily what is necessary in the energy sector.

So you have to ask yourself—change was asked for, change was needed, changes were expected much sooner than this government ever did anything about it. Several years ago, it was clear that there was a problem with energy retailers in this province. There was a problem with whether or not consumers were being properly informed, properly treated, and if there was a problem, if they were given the proper opportunity to exit themselves from these energy contracts.

Myself, I might be at somewhat of an advantage—or disadvantage, depending how you look at it. As the energy critic, I probably get—and I'm not going to presuppose what anybody else in this House has go through their office—as many or more requests from consumers about concerns with energy contracts that they have signed at their home and at the door. It has made it clear to me, as I know it is clear to every member of this House—I know that there's not a single member of this House, I would be pretty confident in saying, who hasn't had some contact with a consumer who has a horror story to tell about an energy retailer or the representative—in fairness, the representative—of an energy retailer come to their door. In many cases, they can absolutely prove that there was a misrepresentation on the part of that agent. That's one of the things that absolutely something had to be done about; there was a clear environment out there where people were going to the door and saying things that they had no right to say or that were, in fact, completely untrue.

One of the things that this legislation—I don't want my friends across the way to think that I'm negative, because I am not a Negative Nelly; you know that. No, I want you to understand that we support the premise behind bringing forth legislation to protect consumers, because that has to be our highest priority.

The challenge is sometimes just getting it right. Sometimes they have a good idea here, but then you ask yourself, "If it was such a good idea on December 10, 2009, was it not just as good an idea in January 2009 or December 2008?" I can't remember exactly when David Ramsay brought in the private member's bill. Because I remember having conversations with—

Mr. Dave Levac: It was a good idea before that.

0910

Mr. John Yakabuski: It was a good idea before that. The member from Brant is absolutely right, and I know he's one of the guys who has raised this issue himself. He's probably had issues in his own riding with people bringing that to his attention. But, yes, it was a good issue before that, and you have to ask yourself, why did the Minister of Energy at the time, George Smitherman, take so long to react and bring in a piece of legislation?

I remember having conversations with the minister—because I was the energy critic, and still am—and saying, "What's happening here?" "Well, Yak, we're coming with something. We're coming," and then he actually made the public announcement before we left, before we shut down the House in June, that he'd have new legislation coming in September. Well, September came and went; the leaves turned colour. October came and went; Halloween passed. November came and went; Remembrance Day ceremonies were over. The only thing that changed is that George stepped down as the Minister of Energy to run for mayor of Toronto and left it to Gerry Phillips to bring forth this piece of legislation.

Now, there is clearly a need for the protection, but there are definitely some issues with this legislation as well. That's what our job is, as opposition, and you're

going to hear this not only from us. I'm actually very pleased that the issue is being brought before the House early in this new—what do we call this? It's not a session. Whatever we call these things whenever we break.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Maybe we should prorogue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, we're not prorogued. We're not prorogued yet, I say to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. We're not prorogued yet; the Premier apparently wants to. But when we come back from a recess, a break.

I'm actually pleased that the government is moving quickly on this so that we can get this issue to committee and get this dealt with as quickly as possible, so that stakeholders in the industry also are aware of the commitment, not only of the government but of this entire legislative body, to bring forth legislation that will protect consumers from nefarious acts at the door. The sooner we get this dealt with in second reading debate, which we've resumed this morning, the sooner we get this to committee.

I've had the opportunity to meet in the intersession with some of those stakeholders and groups, who expressed some of their concerns. Some of their concerns strike me as legitimate. We have to ask ourselves sometimes, do we need a sledgehammer if a fly swatter will do? I'm not suggesting that this is a minor problem, not in the least, but some of the scope of this legislation goes beyond energy retailing and into—and I think this is something the members on the opposite side should be very worried about. I see the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities listening carefully, because I know that these are things he would be concerned about. We're actually looking at ripping apart the mandate of the Ontario Energy Board in this piece of legislation. That is something that should concern us all.

You know, my friend from Peterborough, Mr. Leal, is more of a historian than I am, but I do believe it was the Davis government that brought in the Ontario Energy Board. My father would have been a member of that government. That was brought in to protect; its mandate was to protect the energy consumer in the province of Ontario. It took the politics out of the issue. It took the responsibility of running the Ministry of Energy and left it with the Minister of Energy and his or her ministry, but it took the issue of protecting the consumer—and sometimes that meant protecting the consumer from the Minister of Energy and the minister, and at that time Ontario Hydro, which had an essential monopoly—almost a monopoly—of power generation and distribution in the province of Ontario.

So what this piece of legislation does, in some ways—but if it does it in any way, it's something that we should be concerned about in all ways—is what it does to the Ontario Energy Board, because the establishment of that was done for very, very good reason: that the consumer had to be able to confidently know that there was a watchdog in place whose mandate was there to protect them. That has never gone away.

Now, what the Minister of Energy and the ministry have a responsibility to do is to ensure that the Ontario Energy Board actually has the arrows in its quiver, the tools in its arsenal, as they say, to effect that protection to consumers in the province of Ontario. It is not the job of the ministry to take that quiver and empty it so that the Ontario Energy Board becomes a mere shell of what it was intended to be, and those are concerns that have been raised to us in the Progressive Conservative caucus by stakeholders here in the province of Ontario about what this piece of legislation might be doing to the Ontario Energy Board.

If you want to ensure that there's protection—and we support the premise behind the legislation, absolutely. But I believe we can accomplish that without eviscerating the Ontario Energy Board itself. That's something that I think the government needs to take a real look at, and I'll get into more details about some of those concerns—more specifically, how that might impact the Ontario Energy Board and the business itself.

We have to remember that when you enact a piece of legislation, you cannot ensure everything. The only way to ensure that there would not be a problem in the sale of any product, be it electricity or gas at the door, be it a vacuum cleaner, be it a product that is sold over the Internet, be it a product that is sold in a retail establishment—the only way you could ever be absolutely, 100% certain that there would never be anything worrisome or of an illegal or a nefarious or unsavoury nature happening during one of those transactions is to make those transactions illegal.

I believe the member from Algoma-Manitoulin has actually brought forth a private member's bill that would make the sale of energy contracts at the door illegal, and I understand, to some degree, where he's coming from, but he also has to understand that if an energy contract should be illegal at the door, then perhaps selling anything at the door—some people might argue that selling anything at the door leaves so much grey area and has so little control in place as to effectively disinvolve any agency or the government from having any ability to protect the consumer at all.

But one thing that industry does have in place and is actively—and they have made their pitch. I know they met with David Ramsay over his private member's bill, and I know they met with George Smitherman when he was the Minister of Energy, and I know they met with myself as the critic, and I'm quite certain they would have met with the critic for the New Democratic Party as well.

0920

There were some undertakings offered by the industry that I think need to be at least looked at. They've raised some concerns with the bill about some of the effects that portions of this bill might have. If you're not going to go down the road of making the contracts illegal, which my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin would like to do—and I respect his views—then it seems kind of counterintuitive to create the environment that would actually push the

people out of business anyway without having had some input into the legislation that governs them.

There are a number of issues that they have raised, and I'm not in a position to make a determination, based on what we do know, that this would be the right way to go, the somewhat right way to go, the not-so-right way to go or the wrong way to go. But I think that it's part of the process, and it's why I'm saying that it's a good thing that the government is bringing this bill forward early, in this first week back after the winter break, so that we can get some of the things dealt with, so that we can have some of these stakeholders join us at committee, so that we can hear from them with the myriad of concerns that they've raised with us and I know they have raised with members of the government caucus as well.

One of the concerns they have talked about, for example, is the third party verification. The way they put it is, if you have a third party verification, as one stakeholder said to me, that's all fine and good, but that will be 80 jobs immediately cut out of their company; 80 jobs will be cut from their payroll if you have that third party verification.

The other thing that they raised, for example, was a 30-day time to verify. There are a number of issues that could come into play, whether it's a billing cycle change, but also, whether that is a proper length of time versus any other industry. Their view was that the best way to get that contract verified was to have a verbal verification, reaffirmation within 10 days or after 10 days of signing the contract.

They also offered something that the government should think about, too: an opportunity for the buyer, the purchaser of the contract, to get out of it without any penalty after the first bill. They can then make their determination whether or not it's something they want.

What brought these contracts about in the first place was a desire for certainty. Back in the early part of last decade, there was a move to deregulate the electricity industry. At that time, energy contracts—and quite frankly, the side that has caused the most angst is the electricity side of it; not the gas side of it so much, but the electricity side of it. Back in the early 2000s there was a move by the then government to deregulate electricity prices. What happened was—the timing probably couldn't have been worse—it spawned the sale and the introduction of these energy contracts, because what some people wanted was certainty. They wanted to know, because there were all kinds of speculation at that time as to what could happen to electricity prices as the market became deregulated. A lot of people wanted certainty in their pricing, and an energy contract was supposed to bring that.

Then, in November 2002, after a summer of really difficult situations in the marketplace where prices skyrocketed, the government of the day made the decision that they would re-regulate prices. That rendered all of these contracts null and void, but the business was still out there signing contracts.

What we've got today—and I see my friends there chortling a little bit but not overly loud, kind of under

their breath, because of the problems that beset the previous government. But what of today, when a person signs a contract because they want certainty and they get anything but? I'm not suggesting that that isn't one of the reasons, but the biggest reason that they have no certainty in the contract today is because of the absolute mess this government has made of the electricity sector.

On the IESO website, they call it a provincial benefit. Now, if you're one of these people who has purchased an electricity contract from an energy retailer, then that provincial benefit is anything but, because whatever the amount may be, whether it's seven cents, eight cents, 8.2 cents, whatever the rate may be that you purchased that electricity at for a five-year contract—it's usually a five-year contract—from the retailer, in Dalton McGuinty's electrical embarrassment you are now paying that provincial benefit on top of that contract price. This month, I believe the provincial benefit is 3.28 cents per kilowatt hour. So whatever you're paying that energy retailer, tack on another 3.28 cents because of the contracts that Dalton McGuinty has signed here in Ontario.

At one point in 2009—and I can't tell you exactly which month it was; I don't have that note with me—the provincial benefit, and take note of this, I say to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, was 4.18 cents per kilowatt hour. That was at a time when the market price of electricity was below a cent per kilowatt hour, but what was Dalton McGuinty doing in Ontario? Here we were in Ontario in the summer of 2009, after he had killed some 200,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario since 2005, with 146,000 net jobs lost last year. While the market price of electricity was at some times under a cent—sometimes it was below zero—we were actually spilling water at our hydraulic stations, letting it go by without spinning the turbines, because Dalton McGuinty had to allow whatever wind was out there into the system. So we were spilling water, renewable energy, past our dams because we couldn't use the power. If you understand how the electricity system works, you can't have more electricity being produced at any given time than is being used. It has to be an exact match. You can't just produce all the energy you want and hope that you've got a buyer for it—no. You can only produce what is being used. It has to be an exact match.

So what was happening? We were actually having water go by our dams, not turning the turbines. Water, which we can produce electricity out of at about two cents a kilowatt hour, was going by the turbines, letting all of the wind turbines go at 13.5 cents—or whatever contracts Dalton has signed secretly that we don't know about—and selling that power to the United States, because we were exporting it; we had too much. We were selling it to the United States at whatever the market price would be, which on some days was under a penny, some days it was two pennies, and some days it was actually a negative price.

0930

So you have to ask yourself, wouldn't you really want to try to fix this? Wouldn't you really want to be doing

something in the energy sector to try to make it actually representative of what our needs are and what our abilities to produce are?

What does he do? He then signs a contract with Samsung in Korea—\$437 million of free money to Samsung; just, “There you go. Good luck to your Olympic team.” Some \$437 million to create, purportedly, 1,440 jobs: That translates to \$303,000 per job.

I don't have a crystal ball, but I'm pretty confident that if I went out there and canvassed the province of Ontario and went around to company XYZ and entrepreneur ABC and said, “Look, here's the deal: We're the government of Ontario”—assuming I was the government, and I know I'm not, before they remind me of that. “Listen, fellas, here's the deal: We'll give you \$303,000 for every job you produce. We're here to create jobs. We want to create jobs in the province of Ontario. My name is Dalton McGuinty, and I am the job producer, the job creator.”

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I don't think so. You got that wrong. He's not the job producer; he's the job killer.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, but that's what I'm claiming to be—this is a claim. I want to just bring my friend from Timmins–James Bay into the mix here. This is just play-acting at this point.

“So here I am, folks. I'm going to give you \$303,000 for every job you create.” Well, I guarantee you there would be no limit to the number of jobs people would be willing to create at \$303,000 a pop. They might be analyzing the cloud cover of the day and drawing pictures of it. It might be counting the number of stray cats that go by the bus stop at Yonge and Eglinton. I don't know what it might be, but they'll find a job for that person. At \$303,000 a pop, they'll get themselves a job. They'll create a job. That's the job creation program that the Premier's using the Ministry of Energy for, and he's using your tax dollars—\$437 million to Samsung.

Just slide her out there, folks, because, you see, people aren't paying attention sometimes. They only see the headlines in some of the newspapers that are quite friendly to the Liberal Party, as you know. I would never be one to criticize the media, but there are times when even the most objective observer would say that they seem to have taken the position that they need to be the cheerleader for the McGuinty government.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think we got the endorsement of the Barry's Bay Bugle—

Mr. John Yakabuski: There is no Barry's Bay Bugle. It's the Barry's Bay This Week, I say to my friend from Peterborough. But I haven't seen the endorsement for your program in there at any time recently.

The agenda of the government is to try to promote their so-called energy plan. The cost of their energy plan will come back to haunt not only them but the public here in the province of Ontario.

Getting back to that provincial benefit, it's not only the person who signs an energy contract with an energy retailer that pays the price of that provincial benefit. This provincial benefit is basically, so we can put this into the

package, the cost of those sweetheart deals that Dwight Duncan and George Smitherman have signed over the years with their friends in what they see as the answer, with the renewable energy contracts that are priced significantly higher than the market. These are the contracts that are so much higher than the market price of the product they are producing that that is the additional cost; that's part of what is calculated in the provincial benefit. So when you see the provincial benefit and it continues to rise, that is the cost of George Smitherman's Green Energy Act. That's part of it. It's going to continue to rise the more contracts they sign with foreign-based nationals like Samsung that offer no guarantees to Ontario, only guarantees of profit in Korea. That's quite a job creation program that he has embarked on. But he gets the headline he is looking for, and that makes him happy.

The provincial benefit not only affects people who sign a retail energy contract. All of these people who are major energy consumers—over 250,000 kilowatt hours a month—also are victims of the energy policy of this government. I say “victims,” and I emphasize that, Madam Speaker. You see, when the economy was a little better—and the longer Dalton McGuinty has his fingers on the pulse, the farther in the past that better economy is going to be. But when the economy was better and the demand for electricity was higher, and therefore the market price of that electricity was higher, the provincial benefit, although it was very minuscule in nature, did actually amount to a benefit to those large consumers. What it meant then was that when the market price of electricity might have been 6.5 cents per kilowatt hour at any given time—because they pay the market price based on the hourly price, and it can be low at 2 in the morning when the demand is low, but it can be very high at 5 o'clock in the afternoon or 6 o'clock in the evening. It fluctuates on a continuous basis. When the market price was high, that provincial benefit would actually act to mitigate the cost for that major power consumer. So when the times were good, energy prices were high, but, as I say, the provincial benefit was very minuscule. So energy prices were high and the businessman and the producer, the manufacturer, took it on the chin because they paid a high market price for energy.

Then, when business got poorer and they had to lay off people and they were struggling just to keep their heads above water, electricity demand dropped because they were producing fewer products. When the electricity demand dropped, the price went down too. But just when that manufacturer was hoping that, “Oh, great. The price of electricity has gone down. Here it is today at”—we'll just say, for example, it's three cents a kilowatt hour. “Oh, that's great because, you know, two years ago it was 6.9 or 7.3,” whatever. “This is fantastic. It's down to three cents a kilowatt hour.” But then when they get their bill in that infamous month, I think it was August or something this past year, tack on 4.18 cents. Tack on another 4.18 cents for every kilowatt hour used, because that was the provincial benefit. I don't what dictionary the Ministry of Energy uses, but I'll tell you, when

you're taking a provincial benefit of 4.18 cents per kilowatt hour, it's time to get the salve out, because that's painful. That's painful. Every manufacturer, every major consumer in this province, was experiencing that this past summer.

Did you hear a word from this government about trying to address that? Not a word. No, because that didn't fit into the plan with trying to convince the people out there that we had an answer. Just sign more of these expensive contracts; send George Smitherman out there to sign more of these expensive contracts; negotiate behind closed doors with Samsung of Korea for more of these expensive contracts—a \$437-million expensive contract—while our manufacturers were taking it on the chin, in the teeth. That's what was going on in the province of Ontario with this Ministry of Energy.

0940

We're talking about protecting consumers. That's the whole premise of this bill: protecting consumers. Good Lord, you have to ask yourself: What took so long for them to think of the consumer in this province? While the summer drifted on, dragged on, and job losses continued and escalated, where was the government? Planning a mayoralty race for the city of Toronto. Can you imagine that? That's what our Ministry of Energy was being used for, to catapult a former member, a former minister, into city hall.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: If you want to run for mayor of Barry's Bay, we'll help you. It's just an offer.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would never use my position to advantage myself in that way, I say to the government House leader. She was offering to help me become mayor of Barry's Bay. I appreciate the offer but I'm going to decline because I feel that it would not be proper for me to use my office as a member of this Legislature to try to propel myself into another office. I say this to the government House leader, should I choose at some time to seek another office, I will declare that to this House well in advance, and if she's prepared to help me at that time, I will gracefully accept any help she's prepared to give me, but will not do so while working on behalf of the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke in this Legislature.

Look, I've got great respect for George Smitherman, and we got along quite well as minister and critic, but I was really disappointed with the way he handled his exit from this place. I think it could have been done in a much greater and more fitting manner than to basically just try to pave the golden sidewalks down Bay Street to city hall from the Minister of Energy's tower. Where is the Ministry of Energy? I'm not even sure where it is. He never invited me over to his office for a meeting.

Hon. John Milloy: What kind of a critic are you?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I don't have to know where the office is, I say to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's not that important that I know where the office is, but I tell you, I know what the issues are, and this McGuinty government is failing to deal with the issues other than in the most political sense

possible. That is what is truly regrettable here in the province of Ontario. There has to be a better way.

Getting back to the OEB, an agency whose very conception was based on the protection of the energy consumer, it's now being told, "You're not important any more. The Minister of Energy will take care of things." We know how the Minister of Energy took care of things and we know how the Minister of Energy will take care of things. The Minister of Energy tends to look after the Minister of Energy.

Now I'm not implying that the new Minister of Energy has his sights set on a mayoralty campaign, because they can't all run for mayor of Toronto; I know that. Well, we have one going for Ottawa, but he didn't have anything to do with energy.

Of course, you really have to ask yourself the motives when people jump. I can understand when people go from provincial politics to federal politics. It is a natural ascension. It's the senior House in the country, and it's a natural progression. When somebody indicates they are going to run for federal Parliament, I give them all the credit in the world, but they don't know when that election is going to be. But when you say you're going to run for mayor, you know when that election's going to be. It's already scheduled. There's nothing that can change it. There's not a falling of a government or a non-confidence vote or the Governor General or the Lieutenant Governor dissolving the Parliament of the day. No, it's a predetermined date. So when you're sitting in this House and you say, "I'm going to quit to run for mayor," you've already quit, because everything you do from that day on is about your run for mayor, not to serve your constituents as MPP.

What should have happened in this House was that when Mr. Smitherman and Mr. Watson determined they were going to run for mayor, they shouldn't have just resigned their cabinet posts; they should have resigned their seats on the same day. Because once they declare they're running for mayor, they're running for an election that has been scheduled. That's what they're doing. Nobody is silly enough to believe that they're actually working as an MPP after that. Everything they do is to try to build their profile for the job they want, not the job they want out of. That's the thing that I think people shouldn't be using this Legislature for. I think that everyone who's thinking about these things in the future should question that action.

Anyway, we do have a lot to cover here and we are running painfully short of time. There are issues with this bill that we want to address on the part of the stakeholders as well.

I've had some opportunity to meet with a number of stakeholders and discuss what should or shouldn't be in this bill. One thing that we want to advise consumers—and I commend the government for bringing forth this legislation; we just have to get it right. This Legislature is doing the right thing by bringing in protective legislation. It can't do it outside the OEB; it has to work in concert with the OEB—

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's why we took our time to get it right.

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the member from Peterborough: I'll accept your version of that.

Listen, by getting it right, we'll actually produce something that is in the best interest of the consumer at the end of the day. The consumer has to be the number one priority, and we understand that.

I want consumers to remember one thing, and this is something that, in discussions I've had, in discussions that the OEA has had with the retailers and the stakeholders: If someone comes to your door and says they represent the utility, they're lying. They can't. They're representing a retailer. If they come to your door and they say, "We can save you money on your electricity bill," they can't say that. You cannot say that unless it is in fact the case. So if anybody comes to your door and makes statements like that, be wary. If you have any doubt in your mind whatsoever, do not sign that contract. In fact, if you have any doubt in your mind, don't sign any contract.

The consumer, who must be protected, must also be given the proper advice about protecting themselves. I understand, because my mother-in-law was one of the people who signed an electricity contract. Born in Lithuania, never worked off the farm or out of the house, never drove a car—she signed one of these contracts. She's 76 years old. She certainly didn't clearly understand what she was signing. Now, we were able to have that contract reversed. In fact, the company dealt with the agent, who not only misrepresented the product they were selling at the door but misrepresented the company they were supposed to be representing. That agent was dismissed. That's the kind of action that has to happen if a company is aware that they have a rogue agent out there.

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I want to make it clear that in my area, and in general, the problem exists more with the selling of electricity contracts than gas contracts because electricity is regulated. Even the industry itself has said it's questionable as to whether they can offer a five-year contract that offers much benefit to the consumer because there is a regulated price on the product that they're selling. It's not likely to suffer the vagaries of the marketplace like gas prices, which can fluctuate on an ongoing basis.

Anyway, that's something that the industry has to do as well, to ensure that when they have somebody working for them who doesn't play by the rules, who doesn't follow the law, who misrepresents people, they should be the first ones to get rid of them. They shouldn't have to be told to get rid of them. They should get rid of them.

That's one of the concerns they raised about the 30-day verification period. If we don't have a verification period for 30 days, how do we even identify which agents are the problem out there, which agents are causing the grief, which agents are doing things wrong? If we can have that reaffirmation of the contract on a

more orderly, quick basis, we can actually identify the rogues quicker.

I'm not a policy analyst nor, as I say, do I have a crystal ball, but I think some of these things are issues that we need to look at in committee—not as an opposition, not as a government, not as a third party, but as three partisan members of this Legislature that all have a common goal in this place. I know my friend from Timmins—James Bay and I have talked about this. We often differ on things, but we share our views about the importance of protecting the consumers. I know my friends on the government side want to do that as well. We've got to ensure, when we get this bill to committee, that everything we are doing is not based on what is going to be to your political advantage in the government.

That sometimes is a hard thing to square because when you're in government and you get into 2010, when the election is in 2011, sometimes the only thing you can think about is getting re-elected. And sometimes the only thing we can think about is getting elected. So we have to caution ourselves and ensure that the goal is not about the politics of the issue but about what is right for consumers, what is right for energy users, what is right for jobs, what is right for workers, what is right for widows, what is right for single mothers—

Mr. Toby Barrett: Orphans.

Mr. John Yakabuski: For orphans, all of those people. You've got to make sure that the most vulnerable are being protected when you bring in a piece of legislation. Sometimes, and it has happened in the past with all governments, you bring in a piece of legislation and the result of it is that you actually harm the people you are trying to protect.

You remember that bill—was it 210 or whatever it was—Sandra Pupatello brought in when she was the Minister of Comsoc, Community and Social Services? She brought in that adoption law. Remember, she brought in that bill where you were going to open up the adoption records and reveal who was adopted and who wasn't? You remember when she brought in that law and she said, "We've got everything right here. We don't need to listen to the opposition. We don't need to listen to the people coming to committee"? What happened? You remember what happened, folks over there? I see the member from Etobicoke nodding his head. Yes, we remember what happened: She had to tear the whole damned thing up and fix it because she didn't get it right. She didn't listen. So what we need to do today, members on all sides of this House, is listen to the people on all sides of the issue. We've got to make sure that we get it right—the number one priority, as always.

The former Minister of Consumer Services there—I see him sitting there—was a great advocate for consumers. I know that, and I know he continues to be. He knows that protection of the people is priority number one—priority, people, protection.

It's three Ps, not the three Ps that you're sometimes doing with public buildings and that you chastised us for.

Do you remember when you guys used to rip us because we were going to build the new Royal Ottawa Hospital in Ottawa, the mental health hospital, and we were going to use a public-private partnership? You guys said it was crazy, and then you do the same thing. You just put a different kind of bow around the hospital when you cut the ribbon. You describe it differently. We don't want that kind of stuff.

You see, that's the kind of stuff that the public is wary of and that they don't like. They don't like that kind of repackaging of the same stuff. What they want is an honest approach to consumer protection. We have the opportunity here with Bill 235 to do that.

It is an important time to remember what—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Where is Bob Runciman? We miss Bob.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My friend from Mississauga is wondering where Bob Runciman is. As I said when I opened up here today, Bob Runciman, one of the greatest people ever to serve in this chamber, is now serving in the upper chamber of Canada as the honourable senator from Ontario. I'm very proud of that man. I'm very proud that he's there and thank him for the good work that he's done.

I know I shouldn't be paying any attention to those interjections, but when the name Bob Runciman is uttered in this chamber, I take notice. I take notice because he's one of the finest people ever to represent anybody in this chamber, and I'm very proud to have called him a friend and a mentor. When his name is mentioned, I will take notice.

Now, back to protection. I don't know when the government House leader—and she sometimes doesn't tell us things in a timely fashion, but for the most part we're trying to get along. We want to find out as quickly as possible when this bill might go to committee, because I'm anxious, and I anticipate with great—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Zeal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Zeal and fervour—is it zeal because it rhymes with Leal? Is that why you say it? But I anticipate with great Leal—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Zeal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And Leal—this coming forward at committee to hear what the industry, what consumers, what all of the people have to say about this bill so that at the end of the day we get it right.

I believe there's an opportunity: We can get it right. I believe we will get it right because you know what? We have to get it right. I'm not being aggressive here; you know that's not me. But I do want to warn you folks over there: Don't try to turn this into a political game. Don't try to turn this into some kind of a political game. You've been using the energy ministry, you've been using the energy sector, you've been using the industry and playing political games with it thus far. It's time to stop. It's time to stop and revert to why we're here.

I know that every one of you over there remembers what motivated you to become a member of this Legislature. I know what motivated you to put your name

on that ballot, to run for a nomination if you had to run for one and to run for election. It was because you were committed to serving the constituents who were going to elect you. We cannot forget when we get here as a body, as a group, that owe that same commitment to the people of Ontario.

I'm looking forward to bringing this bill to committee, seeing every improvement that we can make to it happen and then proceeding with a piece of legislation that protects consumers in Ontario. I have many points that I can't get to at this point, but if we don't recess until 10:15, if they're prepared to let me go on, I'll go on. If not, we'll bring this up at a further time.

Don't forget the people.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As my good friend Mr. Yakabuski, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, was saying—we were just having this chat, in fact, as we walked in this morning—we often differ as far as outlooks on particular issues from party to party, but at the end of the day we're all here to serve. I agree with him on that. But I've got to say, listening to a debate about consumer protection for electricity consumers, to which the Liberals have offered a bill, and now we have the Conservatives debating on their lead, is a little bit much for me.

I take a look at what the effect is of what both the Tories started and the Liberals are now continuing when it comes to hydro policy and the negative effect it has had on our economy. In northern Ontario, we have lost in the tens of thousands of jobs, and one of the reasons is electricity prices. It happens to be that the industries we have in the north are huge consumers of electricity. In fact, paper mills, mines, smelters and refineries use an enormous amount of electricity by the very nature of what it is they have to do. A number of them have closed down, and one of the reasons they cite is the price of electricity. So to listen to my good friend the critic on energy for the Conservatives talk about consumer protection on electricity, I've got to say it's a little bit hard for me to listen to, because I look at the faces of those people who have lost their jobs across the north as a result of electricity prices—one of the big reasons—and I look at what's happening at Xstrata today. It's not the only reason, but it's one of the contributing factors. It is hard to take.

Listening to a debate by Liberals and Conservatives on energy policy is a little bit like watching two people having a pillow fight in the same bedroom. You both agree at the end of the day on the ultimate means; you're just fighting for who's going to hang onto the pillow and whack who. That's what the debate is all about. I say, if we want to have a real debate about energy prices, let's do something in order to attack the price of electricity for both consumers and industrial users in this province, because if we don't, there are going to be a lot more job losses in this province.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to offer the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke a few comments. I'll be very brief in answering some of the questions and comments he made about the bill because there wasn't an awful lot about the bill that he talked about specifically; he was more interested in scoring some political points against the former member from Toronto Centre–Rosedale. I'm more interested in talking about the bill.

The bill will be going to committee. There's an answer for the member right off the bat: The bill will be going to committee after second reading. We've been doing that since we've been elected. We've been bringing bills to committee and we do have an honest response from the people out there. There will be people who will be against the bill who will be coming to committee and making their points. Quite frankly, we're continuing the trend of making sure that bills come to committee, which will be done. I'll say it three times now. That's twice, now the third time: The bill will be going to committee.

The second thing that the member might want to know is that there will be some consultations. Later on this year, there will be some consultations on the draft regulations to ensure we get that part right, which has never been done on an ongoing basis from the previous government—and I'm glad you mentioned the record of the previous government. The record of the previous government got us to where we are today, and I'm glad you recognized that.

We are going to be moving to committee. We are going to be listening carefully. There are seven key points in the bill that I want the member to know that I'm sure he had in his notes somewhere, which he wanted to talk about. The salesperson's practices at the door are going to be confined, refined to the point where your mother-in-law would never have to go through that again. We're talking about the protection of the people at the door. We're going to put the rules and regulations in place that will ensure that we don't have the messes that each and every one of us has had to deal with at the door. There are six other points that I'll get into later in detail as the parliamentary assistant—

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke gave us a tremendous amount of information this morning and also information about the bill we're debating, Bill 235, energy retailers. There's no question the past seven years have been uncertain for people who consume electricity, which is just about everybody in the province of Ontario. As MPPs, we get complaints about the people who come to the doors of some of our constituents and the contracts that they get talked into signing. It is difficult for people to get out of these contracts, although there are possibilities of rectifying some of these problems. But it has been seven years of what I consider lack of leadership in really dealing with the electricity file.

What people are concerned about is the cost. They're concerned about the price. It wasn't that long ago when we were in government that we locked in the price at something like 4.7 cents a kilowatt hour. We know that coal and water can produce electricity at much less than that, and both these commodities are underutilized right now. I think manufacturing, given the job losses, is probably using maybe half the electricity that they were at one time. As far as pulp and paper, the high cost of electricity put much of them out of business—they're not using any right now in much of northern Ontario.

You look at the cost of nuclear and natural gas. Wind is being subsidized at something like 14 to 17 cents a kilowatt hour; solar, up to 80 cents a kilowatt hour. If you're a member of the Samsung corporation, you're looking at a subsidy far beyond that. And I see no talk of subsidies yet for biomass, wood pellets or prairie grass.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: It's good to be back here in Toronto in the Legislature and have an opportunity to go on the record and offer my support on Bill 235, the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009, introduced by our government today and just beginning the second reading process. We're very excited about it.

I would suggest to those who are interested in this particular issue that I can probably offer comments that would be consistent with most members in the Legislature: that this is one issue, certainly in my riding association—not my riding association, I apologize, my constituency office; sometimes in my riding association it comes up as an issue—that has seized the staff in my constituency office since I was first elected in October 2003.

This idea of energy retailing at the door is still a relatively new phenomenon in the province, although not quite so new anymore. But certainly in my riding association and in my constituency office, my staff have been seized on a regular basis with dealing with this issue from people who have been the subject of energy retailers on a door-to-door basis. High-pressure tactics are sometimes, if not always, used in the retailing of these contracts, sometimes preying—I would say it's not an overstatement—on people who find themselves in the position of being alone, who don't have the supports necessary to make what is probably the right decision, leaving some people feeling very vulnerable and finding themselves having entered into contracts that they wish they would have been able to get out of.

I would commend one of my staffers, Sharla Knapton, in my constituency office in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, who has done a tremendous job on this file, and who has, in fact, helped a lot of people who have found themselves tied into these contracts to get out of these contracts after the fact. Obviously, this government bill is going to make it less likely that more people will find themselves in this situation in the future, so that the work of staff in constituency offices will not necessarily be required as much in the future.

It's a very good bill, and we're very happy to bring it forward and support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the members for Timmins–James Bay, Brant, Haldimand–Norfolk and Thunder Bay–Atikokan for their comments. It seems that we all agree on one point: We've all dealt with issues surrounding energy retailers in our ridings on more than one occasion.

To the member from Brant: The industry itself has indicated quite clearly that they want a best-practice-at-the-door part of this legislation to be enacted, so that they have the best practices with which to guide them when they are conducting themselves at the door. So when we get to committee, we can make sure that the best parts of the bill are retained, and if there are areas that can be improved upon, that we do exactly that. So I am looking forward to that part of it.

The one thing that I'm pleased with from the responses is that we all agree—whether they think I may have been partisan in any part of my address. In an hour you may slip out of the mode for a moment, here or there, and fail to address the exact bill, just because an hour is a long time. But certainly, what we saw here today was that there is a commitment on the part of all of us to work together to bring about better consumer protection for the energy consumer in Ontario.

With respect to my friend from Timmins–James Bay, pricing of the product is a big issue which he raised as well, which we think that the government can't forget as well.

This bill, as it is, is a good start. We have to work on it, we have to make it better and we have to make sure that all sides are being heard when we bring the final piece of legislation. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1010 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR TORONTO CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table a certification of the by-election in the electoral district of Toronto Centre.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I've received a letter addressed as follows:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller
“Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
“Room 104
“Legislative Building
“Queen's Park
“Toronto, Ontario
“M7A 1A2
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 6th day of January, 2010, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor to the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Eric Morse, returning officer for the electoral district of Toronto Centre, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Toronto Centre in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of George Smitherman who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Toronto Centre, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Toronto Centre on the 4th day of February, 2010, Glen Murray has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 12 day of February, 2010, which is now lodged in record in my office.

“Yours sincerely,

“Greg Essensa

“Chief Electoral Officer

“Toronto, February 12, 2010.”

Mr. Murray was escorted into the House by Mr. McGuinty and Ms. Smith.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Glen Murray, member-elect for the electoral district of Toronto Centre, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Let the honourable member take his seat.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Norm Miller: I am pleased to welcome district of Muskoka Councillor Fran Coleman, who's in the east visitors' gallery. She's bringing 2,300 petitions to do with health care today.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Good morning, Speaker and everybody. I'd like to introduce my friend John Moore of Newstalk 1010, sitting in the west members' gallery.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm pleased to introduce Michael Musing, the father of Michael Musing, father of page Max, who is here to observe the proceedings today and to see how well his son does as a page.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to introduce Josifina Orido and Hani Louis, mother and father of Julia Louis, who is a page here today, and her sister Joanne Louis. I saw the family yesterday skating, met them for the first time, and it's great to have them here in the Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, before I ask my opening question to the Premier, I'm delighted to take a moment

to congratulate the organizers of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. The opening ceremonies were a spectacular success. We want to thank them for getting the games off to a great start and to bronze medal winner Kristina Groves of Ottawa, along with athletes from across Ontario and Canada. The Ontario PC caucus will be cheering for them as they own the podium.

To the Premier: Can you say with confidence that your unaccountable, unelected local health integration networks, or LHINs, are not handing out sweetheart deals to Liberal-friendly consultants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's good to be back, Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to welcome all members back. There is much work before us. We've accomplished much together, but there's still obviously so much more to do.

With respect to our local health integration networks, we are proud of the people who serve on those bodies throughout the province of Ontario. They are an effort on the part of this government to ensure that more and more of the decision-making with respect to the investment of health care dollars in communities is made by people living in the communities themselves.

I thank the people who do that work on our behalf and on behalf of the member opposite, and I look forward to more questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, at the beginning of your summer of scandal you rushed to announce a list of government ministries and agencies subject to new rules prohibiting sole-source contracting. But not-for-profits such as your LHINs, these regional health bureaucracies, were not included in your June 17 announcement.

Premier, when you made that announcement, why were LHINs excluded from the ban on sole-source contracts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just remind all the members of what we did at the time. My honourable colleague is correct: We found that the rules that we had inherited from the previous government were inadequate, so we made them stronger. We've said under our new rules that there can be no more sole-sourcing of consulting contracts; we will not pay consultants for any hospitality, incidental and food expenses; we're requiring that expenses in fact be posted online for our senior executives of our 22 largest agencies; and what's more, those same 22 largest agencies' employees must now have their expenses approved by the Integrity Commissioner. We think that's a huge step forward in an era of heightened transparency and accountability.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's only the second question of the session and the Premier is already dodging giving direct answers, and we all know why: After Dalton McGuinty put out his new rules banning sole-source deals, he was caught sole-sourcing sweetheart deals to the Windsor Energy Centre, the Casino Niagara lease and your mother of all untendered contracts, your sweetheart Samsung deal.

The Toronto Central LHIN appears to be following your lead. How do we know? Well, we called them and asked. Freedom-of-information records that were released to the Ontario PC caucus show that the Toronto Central LHIN sole-sourced an \$80,000 contract to your good friends the Courtyard Group.

Premier, why is it you're always diverting funds meant for Ontario patients to your Liberal friends?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague is making statements that have no foundation in fact.

Just so we're clear, we're now requiring that our local health integration networks provide a written declaration that they are in compliance with government directives, including those relating to procurement. I can also assure Ontarians there will be more random audits to ensure that this is in fact the case—that is, that LHINs are complying with the new rules we have in place.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: We're not the only ones very curious about the problems that the regional health bureaucracies, your LHINs, created. The Ombudsman will soon be releasing his report on your regional health bureaucracies.

The Toronto Central LHIN, which made the sweetheart deal with the Courtyard Group, is the same bureaucracy the Premier gave the \$15 million to, which helped the former mayor of Winnipeg's by-election campaign this past month. Premier, you know as well as we do that Courtyard is run by John Ronson, who, the eHealth boondoggle taught us, is very well connected to the McGuinty Liberals.

Premier, why was the money for patient care diverted to the man who runs election campaigns for the Liberals instead of to Ontario patients?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It has been said that hope springs eternal, but maybe from time to time it runs dry. It had been my hope that this year, my honourable colleague would begin to understand the nature of the real challenges facing the people of Ontario, particularly insofar as they relate to jobs, the economy, the desire for better health care and the like. But so be it; he pursues his own chosen path.

Again, I continue to have confidence in our local health integration networks. I have confidence in the new rules that we have put in place. We have confidence in my Minister of Health, who has recently sent a directive to our local health integration networks demanding that they abide by those same new, strong rules that were not in place at the time that my honourable colleague was in government.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The big winner, Premier, in the sweetheart deal the Toronto Central LHIN handed to Courtyard was none other than Karli Farrow. Karli Far-

row, of course, Premier, is your former health policy adviser who billed the health care system over \$46,000 for just two months of consulting. Farrow was paid thousands of dollars for meetings with other Courtyard consultants including Michael Guerriere, another infamous character from your eHealth boondoggle. Farrow even charged Ontario patients for a lunch she had with Tess Romain, who worked in the health minister's office.

Are contracts LHINs hand to former Premier's office staff and Liberal-friendly firms part of a second career program you have for disgraced eHealth consultants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is well aware that there are rules in place governing what former members of staff can and cannot do, and those have to be cleared by the Integrity Commissioner. I have every confidence that they, in fact, have.

I believe my colleague is talking about an \$80,000 contract—I think that's the neighbourhood—which was to help implement a diabetes strategy for the Toronto LHIN. That's a program that helps people with diabetes manage the disease. We think that's a very important and worthwhile investment to be made on behalf of Ontario taxpayers, and I would hope that my friend would support that kind of effort being made by the LHIN.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here's the problem: There is one set of rules for Liberal-friendly consultants and one set of rules for everybody else. It goes further. Matt Anderson, the CEO of the Toronto Central LHIN, is the one who inked the sweetheart deal with Michael Guerriere. Anderson was your appointee to the eHealth board and he sits on it today. As the eHealth boondoggle revealed, Anderson is related to Guerriere through marriage.

At a time, Premier, when you've shut down emergency rooms in communities like Fort Erie and Port Colborne, at a time when we saw fatalities over the Christmas holidays that may have been related to the closed ERs, Liberal-friendly consultants are getting rich and Ontario families are getting nothing in return.

Premier, I ask you, is there anywhere in the health care system where former staffers and Liberal-friendly consultants are not cashing in at Ontario patients' expense?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to quote from a letter sent by the Minister of Health, Deb Matthews, to our LHIN board chair. The letter is dated February 4, and it reads as follows, in part:

"Public confidence and trust is crucial to continuing this progress. As health care leaders, we need to spend tax dollars wisely and we need to be accountable for our decisions. I can't overemphasize how important it is to ensure that every single dime we spend within our health care system is spent in a way that would be acceptable to a thoughtful taxpayer.

"Last summer and fall our government brought in tough new rules to increase accountability and transparency. The rules must be taken seriously and I expect them to be followed."

I could not have said it better myself. We expect LHINs and all of our government agencies to abide by the tough new rules that we've put in place.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Every day in Ontario, millions of people get up and make our province work. These women and men will lead the way for Ontario's recovery but only if their government is on their side lending a helping hand. Instead, they see their government raising their taxes, closing their local emergency rooms and ignoring their voices.

In this session, will the Premier start putting the well-being of Ontarians at the heart of his plans, or will he continue to focus on the priorities of his well-connected friends and funders?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask you to withdraw it.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stand right up.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Withdrawn.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's good to be back.

I want to welcome the question from my colleague. We have never taken our eye off the ball, which represents the interests of our families. Right now, today, at this point in our history, they're very concerned about jobs and the economy. That's why, since this House recessed, for example, we have rolled out the first part of our plan to bring full-day learning to our four- and five-year-olds, knowing that a strong start in school makes for a strong finish that ends with jobs. I know that my honourable colleague supports that program.

I know that my honourable colleague also supports our new partnership with Samsung, the biggest deal of its kind anywhere in the world: 2,500 megawatts of clean energy, four new manufacturing plants, 16,000 jobs.

Finally, I know that my colleague supports the tax cut received by 93% of Ontarians, effective January 1 of this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are facing tough times. Since this session in the Legislature started, 200,000 people have lost their jobs. Thousands more wonder whether they're going to have enough money to retire on. Hospitals are closing clinics and emergency rooms, and fees for everything from transit to health services are rising.

Can the Premier explain why, when so many people are struggling, his biggest priority is a \$4.5-billion tax cut for some of Ontario's richest corporations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are two independent reports I want to recommend to my honourable colleague. One is from Jack Mintz. He works out of Calgary. He tells us that our package of tax reforms will

lead to nearly 600,000 more jobs over the course of the next 10 years.

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Now, my colleagues don't appreciate Dr. Mintz, but I would then instead refer them to a report prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and I think the title says it all. It says, *Not a Tax Grab After All: A Second Look at Ontario's HST*. I would strongly recommend both of those reports to my honourable colleagues. Our tax reforms, in fact, cost the treasury billions of dollars over the first two years.

This is about investing in our families; it's about investing in jobs; it is about investing in a bright future.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, the Royal Bank announced their CEO would be taking \$10 million home after the bank pulled in \$3.9 billion in profits. They're getting a tax cut from this Premier. Meanwhile, a local paper tells the story of Barb Pickering. You want to know about Barb Pickering? She spent Thursday afternoon on the phone, calling pain clinics around the GTA in search of one that would take her on as a patient. Why? Because her local hospital closed the pain clinic that she was using.

Can the Premier explain why the Royal Bank needs a tax cut but Barb Pickering's hospital can't keep the services going that she relies on every day?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know my colleague is interested in the quality of health care that we provide to all our families, and I want to remind her just a little bit about our record. During the course of the past six years, as we've enjoyed the tremendous honour of serving Ontarians in government, we have made dramatic new investments in health care: 42% more by way of increase in funding for our hospitals; thousands more nurses; more doctors—800,000 more Ontarians now have access to a family doctor. We've reduced wait times. We have nurse practitioner-led clinics, the first of their kind in North America. That's the kind of investment, that's the kind of priority that we attach to health care for our families.

So my colleague may say that there are outstanding issues with respect to health care, and she is right. There will always be more work to be done there, but she cannot claim legitimately that we have not made health care a priority for Ontario families.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier as well. You know the Premier isn't just concerned about his well-connected friends; it seems the prospects of his party can also inspire swift action. After months of telling local hospitals to close clinics and emergency rooms, the government announced plans to spend \$15 million on renovations to the Toronto Grace Hospital in Toronto Centre, where a by-election was

taking place. What's the difference between Toronto Grace and the hospitals across Ontario that are currently left scrambling for funds?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I really do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this particular issue. The Salvation Army has a stellar record in the history of this province. They made it clear to us that they could no longer continue the responsibilities that they've taken on at this particular hospital site. They made it clear to us as well that we could help. If my friend is now telling me that she is against that help, that we should have stood by and allowed that hospital and those services at that site to shut down and to close, then she should say that. We felt the appropriate thing to do, the responsible thing to do, was to provide that support for that hospital, just as we've increased funding by 42% for hospitals Ontario-wide during the course of the past six years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Nortel pensioners have been waiting for over a year for help from the government. The government threw them a meagre lifeline, but only when a by-election was called in the riding where many of them lived. Can the Premier maybe explain that coincidence to us?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we're very proud of the partnership that we have with all of our hospitals. We're proud of the continuing support that we provide at our hospitals, as I say, some 42% over the course of the past six years. Contrast that with a cost-of-living increase, I think in the range of 11%, and you can see that we are truly putting our money—it's not our money—taxpayers' money where their priorities are, which is their health care system. We're proud of the fact that we are able to find some assistance for this particular Salvation Army hospital. It's a hospital which is delivering services that are so important to the members of the community that it serves.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier travels the province telling hard-working people that they need to expect less. They're told to pay a new sales tax, watch their local hospitals close ERs and clinics, and watch jobs disappear. The government can't help them. Then they see the money flow, but only when it helps the McGuinty Liberals and their friends. Is it any surprise to the Premier that people see his government as arrogant and out of touch?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just so we're clear, and I think it's helpful to understand what we've done with respect to hospital funding: We've increased funding by \$4.6 billion since 2003. That's a 42% increase. Every hospital in the province has seen its budget increase every year. I contrast that to the days that were there under the two previous governments.

These are challenging times. There's no doubt about that whatsoever. I know that my honourable colleague understands that. I'm sure that every member in this Legislature understands that. We're going to have to

make difficult choices, but they will be responsible choices. They'll be informed by the values and priorities of Ontario families. Ontario families insist that we be there for them when it comes to their health care and their education, and we most certainly will.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is also for the Premier. When in opposition, Dalton McGuinty said he was against spending public money on partisan advertising, but records released as a result of freedom-of-information requests show that you paid \$700,000 to Narrative Advocacy Media, a firm closely connected to the Liberal-friendly ad firm Bensimon Byrne. The auditor rejected Narrative Advocacy's work, saying the primary objective of their ads was to promote the partisan interests of the McGuinty Liberals.

So my question is for the Premier. Will the McGuinty Liberals pay back the \$700,000 of public money that they spent for their own version of the Liberal Party Adscam?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Happy Family Day to all. Glad to see us all back.

I've had an opportunity as Minister of Revenue to crisscross this province, and what people are asking me is, where's a good place they can go to find the information that they need to know about how tax reform—the largest tax reform in 40 years—affects them, their family and their business?

As a result, our ministry has created a website at ontario.ca/taxreform, and just last week we started an advertising campaign telling people they should take a closer look. That's why we are running those ads, because people are telling me that they need to find that information. That's why it's important that we will always share with the good people of Ontario where that accurate information is.

It's important for us to always make sure that any government advertising is approved by the Auditor General. We're proud to have brought in that bill, and we'll continue—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I can tell you what Ontario families are telling me. It's bad enough that you use tax dollars to promote a tax, but you use public money to also promote your own Ontario Liberal Party—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Start the clock. Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

They used tax dollars to promote a tax, but what is worse, they use public money to promote the Ontario Liberal Party. They handed over \$700,000 to a Liberal-friendly ad firm, Narrative Advocacy, whose Amanda Alvaro has close ties to Gerard Kennedy and is connected to their good friends at Bensimon Byrne. The fact that the advertisements did not run is not the point. It doesn't change the fact that they wasted taxpayer money. Why

do they keep wasting taxpayer dollars that are earned by hard-working Ontario families so that they can give their friends in the Ontario Liberal Party our tax dollars?

Hon. John Wilkinson: As I was mentioning, our tax reform is all about creating new jobs, and I thought the questions today would be about the need for our economy to generate more jobs. By merging our sales taxes and taking that additional revenue and permanently cutting taxes for both people and business, we're creating a new competitive environment that will allow for additional investment—some \$47 billion, according to a leading economist, that will lead to 591,000 net new jobs.

But what I find interesting is that the member is raising this issue when today, when I had a chance to look at your website, I see that it is inaccurate. That is exactly why people need to have a place that they can go to where the information is accurate. They can take a closer look and examine how tax reform impacts them, their family and their business as we prepare for a year of tax reform, which started on January 1 with a tax cut to 93% of Ontario—

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

LABOUR DISPUTE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais commencer par souhaiter à tout le monde une bonne Semaine de la bonté. Happy Kindness Week, everybody.

My question is to the Premier. As you know, the economy in northern Ontario has been devastated by the policies of this government. Right across the north, people are witnessing the destruction of our way of life. In Sudbury and Nickel Belt, more than 3,000 workers of Vale Inco have been on strike since mid-July. That's seven months, with no end in sight.

My question is this: Sudbury is being brought to its knees. Why is this government refusing to take any action whatsoever to deal with this crippling labour dispute?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Labour.

1100

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. I do understand how difficult and frustrating this time is for the people of Sudbury.

The ministry has been meeting with officials from both the company and the union, working with those officials and assisting the parties to come to the table to resolve their differences.

I want to thank my colleague Rick Bartolucci, who has been a tremendous advocate for the community and has been assisting—

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Minister Bartolucci has been doing the right thing. He has been working with the parties, encouraging them to come to the table to resolve those differences that they have.

Our ministry's sole focus is on bringing the parties together to find common ground, to resolve the differences that they have.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: To all of this work, I would say: How is it working so far? It has been seven months.

There's so much that this government could do but is not doing. I've got constituents who are losing their homes. I see families falling apart, breaking up. Food bank use is way up in my riding.

Vale Inco is one of the cornerstones of the Sudbury economy. The longer this strike drags on, the more the people of Sudbury suffer. When will the Premier and his government take notice of the situation in Sudbury and finally do something to get the talks moving again and get the people back to work?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Our mediation team at the Ministry of Labour is working 24/7 to get the parties to the table, to assist them in this bargaining process. I do understand how frustrating and difficult it is.

Minister Bartolucci has shared with me the stories of the hard-working miners, the work that they do and the impact that they have on the community. What we urge the parties to do is to think about their positions and the position of the other party, resolve those differences, find that common ground and understand that the best way to move forward is to have that open dialogue at the table. We will do everything we can to assist the parties to resolve those differences.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Glen R. Murray: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, people in Ontario are facing growing challenges as a result of the worldwide economic recession. This government has made great strides in improving the social assistance system, everything from raising rates to making necessary rule changes.

However, we cannot stop there. As part of the poverty reduction strategy, it was announced that the social assistance system will be reviewed. I have not heard any updates recently but I do understand that there has been work done regarding a review. Minister, could you inform the Legislature and Ontarians as to the progress of the social assistance review?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me congratulate the member from Toronto Centre for his election. I know that he was always a strong advocate for the most vulnerable.

We are looking for ways to improve our programs, to more effectively support clients in their transition back to employment. As part of the poverty reduction strategy, I have appointed, as Social Assistance Review Advisory Council chair, Gail Nyberg from the Daily Bread Food Bank.

The council has been hard at work, providing me with recommendations on possible short-term changes to social assistance rules. My ministry is currently reviewing these changes.

This review demonstrates our commitment to working with our municipal partners to simplify and modernize

the social assistance rules and to better integrate employment services and harmonize housing supports.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Minister, short-term changes to the social assistance system are a good start but they can only be the beginning. What Ontarians need are not just short-term changes but changes that will help people overcome barriers in the long term and give them the tools necessary in order to get ahead in life.

Minister, we have an opportunity with the social assistance review to help provide these tools. Is the social assistance review council examining the overall social assistance system, and if so, what are they looking at addressing?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, the council will submit recommendations by April 2010 on the scope and terms of reference that will guide the development of the larger social assistance review. Their recommendations will include a long-term vision for social assistance in Ontario as well as the vision's core objectives that will form the basis of their review. I will continue to work with the council, with Ontarians and with my colleagues, especially the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who has spearheaded the poverty reduction strategy, as we move forward with this review on social assistance.

We all agree that the moral imperative for reducing poverty is clear. Children should have the opportunity to succeed in life and people facing challenges should be given the tools that they need to help them reach their full potential. I'm very confident that this advisory council will give me very good recommendations—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Since we last sat in this House, Dalton McGuinty made a multi-billion dollar sweetheart deal with a foreign company. He paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to avoid answering embarrassing questions by settling lawsuits launched by Kelly McDougald and the family in Caledonia. He gave away 15 million of our health care dollars to help elect the former mayor of Winnipeg to Toronto Centre. He is handing out millions more to help his candidate in Ottawa West–Nepean.

I would like to ask the Premier, how much are the votes in Leeds–Grenville worth to you?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please, of impugning motive.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: That was one of those questions that was kind of all over the place, but we seized on the initial beginning of it when the member brought up the \$7-billion investment in Ontario's economy as a result of

the Samsung initiative. That \$7 billion brings with it 16,000 new jobs to this province over the course of six years. How out of touch can the opposition be if they can, at this time in our history, not be in support of the creation of 16,000 jobs in this province?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Along with those 16,000 jobs will be the creation of four green manufacturing plants. Wind towers, solar inverters, solar module assembly and wind blades are all going to be made in this province. We're taking steps to build a strong, green economy—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think Korea was on the podium before these winter games started.

You spend like you don't understand that you have a record-breaking \$25-billion deficit. Your latest insult to Ontario families is wasting their money to sell a tax that the McGuinty Liberal caucus hasn't been able or willing to sell. You've given up on your caucus, enlisting the services of an ad company tied to the infamous Bensimon Byrne that you paid over \$13 million to, including for a redesign of the Ontario trillium to look like a logo for the Ontario Liberal Party.

You used to say, Premier, "You don't need to spin people and tell them you're doing good work for them. Let the policy speak for itself." When will you stop spending Ontario families' money like it's your own partisan slush fund?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think I'd better refer this to the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: What part of 591,000 net new jobs do you not get over there?

I've had an opportunity, as have all members, to talk to our constituents. What our constituents are telling us is that they're looking for jobs. They are happy to hear that there is an investment, the largest green energy investment in history, being made right here in Ontario: 16,000 jobs. They understand that the world has changed and that we need to reform our tax system. Because of those reforms, because we are taking the step of going to one sales tax instead of two in this province, taking that additional revenue and permanently cutting taxes for people and for business, we are making Ontario more competitive. We believe that the business community will in fact make the investments already shown by Samsung that will lead to more jobs. On this side of the House we are for those jobs.

1110

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. In December 2009, Xstrata announced the closure of its copper smelting refinery in Timmins. Premier, can you tell us what you have personally done since last December's announcement to avert this closure?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that Minister Gravelle has been very actively involved on this particular matter. We have been doing everything that we can to lend shape to very welcoming economic macro-conditions, hence the reason for our corporate tax cuts, to make us more attractive, hence the reason for the elimination of capital taxes in Ontario this year. The Mining Act lends some certainty and creates some new opportunities as well. Those are the kinds of things that we continue to do, broadly speaking, but I'm sure that my honourable colleague would like to hear from my minister, and I'll be referencing this question to him on the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, changes to the Mining Act and tax cuts haven't worked. They're shutting the plant down. Over 3,000 people will be losing their jobs directly/indirectly because of this closure. People are wondering where you're at. They know where the minister is at. He has come and met with us a couple of times, but we need the support of the Premier. The people of Timmins and area want to know very clearly: What are you going to do as Premier in order to avert this closure?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed it was devastating news when the announcement was made in December. It was on that basis that I went at the behest of the Premier to Timmins to meet with Mayor Laughren and the economic development corporation, to reassert our very strong commitment to the Timmins area. There is no doubt our commitment is there in terms of the support we have for the northern Ontario heritage fund. There has been over \$15 million that has gone to the northern Ontario heritage fund since 2005—\$45 million in federal-provincial investments.

I realize that this is an extraordinary challenge. I continue to work very, very hard with the community. We're going to be up there again very soon, in fact. The challenge indeed is there, but we have the opportunities there. There are interesting and very positive developments with Lake Shore Gold and Detour Gold. We heard about a wonderful announcement in terms of Northgate Minerals, in terms of Kirkland Lake. There are some positive things happening. We have to keep working hard with the community. I'm committed to—

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

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. For too long, northern Ontario's most precious resource, our youth, have been leaving for larger cities and other provinces with the hope of finding opportunities. Although this has been a constant challenge in northern Ontario, I

know it's an issue our government is taking very seriously.

In Sault Ste. Marie, there have been numerous investments through the northern Ontario heritage fund, which was created by a Liberal government about 20 years ago, and I'm pleased that the draft northern Ontario growth plan focuses on creating more opportunities for youth in the north, as both of these programs are aimed at mobilizing a new generation of entrepreneurs and community builders and reversing the trend of youth out-migration.

Minister, I know you recognize how important these initiatives are. Can you explain to the House how they benefit young people in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the member for the question. He's certainly quite correct. Youth out-migration continues to be a very important issue affecting northern Ontario. That's why our government has introduced some specific programs that aim to prepare northern Ontario's highly skilled young workforce for future employment to secure a more prosperous future for tomorrow's northern families and workers.

In 2005, our government introduced the youth internship and co-op program and the young entrepreneur program, all of which have been remarkably successful. To date over \$28 million has been approved for the youth internship and co-op program, and over 1,500 internships and co-op placements have been created, many of them leading to full-time jobs. The young entrepreneur program is also an extraordinarily successful program. Over \$6.6 million has been invested in that program, creating jobs in northern Ontario for young people with innovative ideas, keeping them in northern Ontario where we want them to stay.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Oraziotti: NOHFC's youth internship and co-op program and young entrepreneur programs are helping youth find employment and assisting them with their entrepreneurial ventures, which is an important step in stemming youth out-migration in northern Ontario. In fact, in Sault Ste. Marie we've invested \$3.4 million, creating over 180 youth employment opportunities with local businesses.

However, as you are aware, youth out-migration does not only apply to our youth; it's part of a broader challenge across northern Ontario.

I understand the NOHFC has many other programs available for northern residents. Many of my constituents have benefited from these programs, which have helped create new jobs. Minister, what other programs does NOHFC offer to help northern Ontario residents build a stronger, more prosperous future for their communities and families?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I think all northerners are very grateful to and very much appreciate the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. It's certainly a vital tool in building stronger, more prosperous northern communities.

We have seven unique programs that we've adapted to help foster hope and employment opportunities across the

north. I think they really are proof that our government is ready to invest in northerners.

We've increased it from \$60 million to \$80 million in the past year, and we do believe very strongly that we can help build a greater future.

To date, the NOHFC has approved over \$500 million toward nearly 3,000 projects, which has leveraged over \$1.6 billion, which is helping to create or retain more than 13,000 jobs in northern Ontario.

I certainly look forward to updating the House about some of our new programs, including the northern entrepreneur program, again a program that is going to help create jobs in the north, keeping them where they need to be for our economic future.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I wrote to you on January 21, requesting a meeting with district of Muskoka councillor Fran Coleman and myself to discuss local health issues. Your staff called my office to advise that you would not attend the meeting. My office was told that it would be "inappropriate for the minister to discuss budget issues." Yet the next week, in the midst of a by-election, you not only met but intervened directly with \$15 million to keep Toronto Grace hospital open. Minister, how do you explain this contradiction?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I'm very pleased that we were able to find a solution when it came to Toronto Grace hospital. I want to welcome representatives from the Salvation Army who are here with us today.

What I can tell you is that we have always supported Toronto Grace hospital and the services provided at that site. It is a very special place. It provides exceptional care to its patients. It provides care to people, some of whom have faced great challenges in their life. They provide palliative care, complex care, rehab services. They are top-quality services. They are a vital part of our health care system.

We have a strong relationship with the Salvation Army. I was absolutely delighted, when I met with them, that they were willing to reconsider their decision and remain committed—

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

Mr. Norm Miller: That was a blah-blah-blah answer. You didn't explain the contradiction.

Minister, today I will present over 2,300 petitions collected in a few short days, signed by concerned residents of Parry Sound–Muskoka. They have watched health care services disappear over the last several years under this government.

Minister, Councillor Fran Coleman is here at Queen's Park today, ready to meet with you to discuss health care issues of critical importance to the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka. My question is: Will you meet with us to ensure that health care dollars are going to front-line

services—doctors, nurses, medical procedures for patients—not your new health bureaucracy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am always pleased to meet with people and I would certainly welcome the opportunity to meet after question period.

Let's just take a moment to think about what we have in fact been able to accomplish over the six years we have been in office. Almost 900,000 more Ontarians have access to family health care than they had when we took office. There are 1,800 more doctors practising medicine in Ontario than there were in 2003. We've got more than 5,600 international medical graduates practising here in Ontario: almost a quarter of the workforce. We've increased medical school spaces by 23%. We've opened a new medical school, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and we recently announced 100 more—in fact, by 2013 we will have doubled the number of graduates from our medical schools. Every year, twice as many will graduate as when we took office.

1120

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Education. As a result of this government's education funding formula that pits parents against parents, schools against schools, and forces boards to close schools, Parkwood Hills Public School in Ottawa, which has 400 students and is operating at 96% capacity, has been designated for a closure. The vote to close this school failed at committee, but it was subsequently approved at the board at a meeting two weeks ago because one trustee was absent due to a family emergency.

My question is this: Will the minister commit today to putting the brakes on this school closure until these voting irregularities can be investigated?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: First of all, I think that it's very important for me to state today that our government is absolutely committed to supporting school boards and the important work that they do to support students in their area. These boards are elected by their community to make the very best decisions in the interests of their children. We respect that process. I would say that while I appreciate that the honourable member—there may be people in the community who do not agree with the decision. We do have faith in the school boards and we do respect the decisions that they make.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The committee voted to keep it open. One person was missing from the board meeting, and then it got voted on to be closed. So there are voting irregularities here that are forcing a school to close when it's at capacity. It makes no sense whatsoever.

Even the president—maybe this will convince the minister, Speaker—

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe this will convince the minister: Even the president of a local Liberal riding association who sits on the school board voted to keep Parkwood Hills open. Parents have real questions about the integrity of this particular process.

Will the minister make a commitment to the parents and the children of Parkwood Hills school to undertake a review of this controversial vote today or does she plan to stand back while Ontario parents watch yet another school shut its doors while questions remain unanswered at a school that is at capacity?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: This government will allow the board to do the work it was elected to do. What I can say to you is—and I have served as a trustee for 14 years; I have served on committees that brought reports to the board that were not always supported—that is the function of the process that is in place at the board level. It is the collective wisdom and understanding of the board that determines the direction the board will pursue. That has happened in this case. We respect that.

I respect that there are some people who are not happy or content with the decision. There are tools at the board level—there could be motions to reconsider a decision that happens at the board level—and I would encourage people in the community who feel strongly that they may want to engage the trustees to consider those types of things.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, as you know, my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga is largely rural, with the three townships, as well as urban with south Kitchener. As such, I've received calls from constituents who have real concerns about coyote sightings. Media stories throughout the province have documented stories of Ontarians who have come too close to coyotes for comfort. In some cases, there have been documented incidents where livestock and coyotes have come into conflict.

My hometown is on the Grand River, and we listen to the coyotes regularly, perhaps a lot more frequently. Are there more coyotes? Is the coyote population in the province increasing? And if it is, what steps can Ontarians take to keep themselves and their families safe?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: My sincere thanks to the member for this question, because it is of concern to Ontarians.

The honourable member correctly points out that this is an issue for many Ontarians. The Ontario coyote population is not threatened; therefore the ministry does not keep hard numbers of the populations of coyotes. That being said, the anecdotal evidence collected by the ministry does point to an increase in human interaction.

Public safety is of the utmost importance for this government, and that's why my ministry has taken significant steps to keep Ontarians informed and safe. MNR is now collecting data from coyote sightings near

human populations to better coordinate future responses. We also released a coyote fact sheet on my ministry's website, and we've shared it with local municipalities. This details the steps that anyone can take to keep themselves safe.

Coyotes have adapted well to living near human populations, and this has increased the number of sightings.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Minister, safety education is paramount. We teach our children safety when living near the water and wildlife, but what more can individuals in Ontario do to keep themselves safe? I am aware of some organizations and municipalities in the province that have called on the province to provide bounties for culled animals and would appreciate knowing the ministry's response to this.

Minister, just how concerned should Ontarians be about coyote-human interaction?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Providing Ontarians with accurate information on how best to deal with their local nuisance coyote population is very important. Coyotes are usually fearful of humans. However, during winter and early spring, when the food resources are scarce, the coyotes are emboldened to explore new urban and rural areas.

Homeowners can take steps to protect themselves. Keep your pets inside when you know local coyotes are out; keep your garbage and your pet food stored and sealed indoors, if possible; and be aware of where your children are at all times.

Ontarians should always exercise caution around wildlife, but aggressive behaviour towards people is unusual for coyotes. My ministry is open to working with any municipality and my ministry's regional offices are providing technical advice on a daily basis.

With regard to the issue of bounties, they're illegal and largely ineffective. If homeowners have specific concerns, our Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act sets out the legal obligations for landowners or their agents when dealing with nuisance animals.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. On October 21, my office filed a freedom-of-information request with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario for the personal expenses of the president, the director of corporate services and the director of research. From 2007 to 2009, the Higher Education Quality Council spent \$12,223 on hospitality and catering. Of that, they repaid \$1,558 the day after we filed the freedom-of-information request.

My question to the Premier is this: Given your new expense rules, why is it that these items were only repaid after we filed the FOI request?

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

Hon. John Milloy: I think members are aware that the Higher Education Quality Council was established as part

of the Reaching Higher program. They provide advice on higher education in Ontario. It's an arm's-length body of the government and is subject to the rules of government expenses. When the Premier introduced new, tougher rules, HEQCO, as did other agencies, adopted those rules, but in the spirit of the new rules, they took the extra step of applying them retroactively and reimbursed some of the expenses.

As I say, they have embraced the new rules going forward, as have other agencies across the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: One of the expensed items was a \$400 engraved watch from Birks jewellers. In addition, there was \$260 in ineligible alcohol expenses and \$769 in reimbursements to agency executives without detailed receipts—all against the new rules. On top of that, the CEO, James Downey, billed a whopping \$11,628.29 for a three-month stay at the Sutton Place Hotel. That's over \$3,800 a month for a luxury hotel room.

My question to the Premier is this: Who is holding these unelected and mostly unknown government agencies to account?

1130

Hon. John Milloy: HEQCO aligns itself with government directives. When the new policy directives came forward from the Premier several months ago, and the honourable member is aware of those, it adopted the new tougher rules. In the spirit of the new rules, they took the extra step of applying them retroactively, and a number of expenses were reimbursed. As I say, HEQCO is following the lead of other agencies.

I'll remind members of the new policy. The new policy includes new and simplified guidelines for travel, meals and hospitality expenses for all OPS employees, political staff and employees at Ontario's agencies, boards and commissions. HEQCO has aligned itself with these new directives.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Health: 2010 is threatening to be a very hard year for the people of Hamilton because of this government's wrong spending decisions. Instead of managing health care dollars wisely, we have seen wild spending on insider consulting contracts and bloated executive salaries. Now Hamilton hospitals are being forced to slash jobs and cut programs.

When will this minister protect health care in Hamilton by spending our health care dollars properly?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This government's commitment to health care, I think, speaks for itself. We have increased spending. We have better results. We are actually posting our results on the website. People know that they have much better health care now than when we came to office in 2003.

We are, however, facing some very serious economic challenges in this province, and I know the member opposite is aware of that. That is why we have asked

hospitals to do the very difficult work, to look hard at the programs and services they offer and put together balanced budget plans. They have embraced this task, I must say, with real enthusiasm, and I think they have brought creative solutions. They are working with the LHINs to really create the best possible health care for people right across this province, including the Hamilton area.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's an interesting response. Last week, St. Joseph's Healthcare announced 12 nursing and staff cuts as well as significant increases to patient and visitor parking fees. This follows the devastating cuts of 149 jobs at Hamilton Health Sciences, as well as reduced patient services. Shockingly, these hospitals warn that the cuts we know of today could just be the tip of the iceberg. Even deeper cuts may be around the corner as the minister speaks.

When will this minister explain why the people of Hamilton are losing their health care services while this government continues to pour our precious health care dollars down the drain?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps I could remind the member opposite about some of the investments that we have made in Hamilton Health Sciences. They have had—get this, Speaker—a more than \$150-million increase in their base funding since we were elected. I just want to repeat that: a \$150-million increase in base funding. That's the funding they get year over year. On top of that, there is funding for other special initiatives, such as reduced wait times.

We have also, in the Hamilton area, invested \$93 million in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN for their aging at home strategy, a strategy designed to take pressure off hospitals and provide services as close to home as possible. We've invested over \$76 million in funding to reduce wait times. That's 32,000 more procedures than otherwise would have been done.

We are in difficult times—

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

PROMOTING ONTARIO

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Tourism and Culture. Minister, the 2010 Winter Games present a unique opportunity that Ontario needs to take part in and seize on. It's presenting a global stage for Ontario to showcase its strength. As the world watches with interest, Ontario needs to take action. We need to take action to showcase the beauty of this province and attract potential tourism. We need to take action to encourage investment and strengthen our global partnership. While we appeal to the international markets, we need to continue our commitment to Ontario businesses. We need to ensure that Ontario businesses play a vital role in any marketing of Ontario that is undertaken in Vancouver.

Minister, what action has this government taken in this forum?

Hon. Michael Chan: In Vancouver, to Canada: Go, Canada, go.

I want to thank the member from Northumberland—Quinte West for the question. Ontario businesses are playing a vital role in promoting the province in Vancouver. Take for instance the Sprucewood Handmade Cookie Co., from the member's riding. They produce delicious cookies that come with both taste and success. The Sprucewood cookie company's cookie is one of 10 products that are in high demand at Ontario House. Here's a great example of the culinary tourism experience that Ontario has to offer.

Businesses like these are playing a vital role as we showcase Ontario as a great place to live, to visit and to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Minister, as the games unfold, many memorable stories will unfold for both Ontario and Canada. One such story should be Ontario's success in reaching out to the world. As we reach out, we need to showcase our diversity, our education system, our competitive tax system and our commitment to research and innovation. These are our greatest strengths. We need to show the world that Ontario is a great place to live, work and invest. Increased activity in tourism is one such venue. Will the minister assure Ontarians that he will move forward to create such opportunities?

Hon. Michael Chan: The past week I had the privilege of being in Vancouver to represent Ontario. We are showcasing all that Ontario has to offer through our pavilion, Ontario House. Our commitment to research and innovation is evident. Among the many leading-edge companies on display at Ontario House is Toronto's InteraXon. Their thought-controlled computer technology has made lighting up the CN Tower, the Parliament buildings and Niagara Falls with your brainwaves a reality. Our government is committed to showcase to the world that there is no place like Ontario. We will continue to do so as we welcome the G8 and G20 countries, worldwide events, the international Indian film festival and, of course, the 2015 Pan American Games, to Ontario.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. John Wilkinson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to correct the record. The website that I referenced is properly found at www.ontario.ca/taxchange.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CITY OF VAUGHAN

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to recognize the city of Vaughan for two recent achievements. In December

2009, the city of Vaughan was awarded the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada.

The Distinguished Budget Presentation Award program recognizes those governments that have succeeded in preparing a high-quality budget document that contributes to better decision-making and enhanced accountability. The criteria and guidelines that the city had to follow in order to qualify for the award require that the budget be an effective policy document, operations guide, financial plan and communications tool.

And if that weren't enough, a recent report by the Conference Board of Canada, entitled *City Magnates II: Benchmarking the Attractiveness of 50 Canadian Cities*, recognized the city of Vaughan as having one of the top two performing economies in Canada. The report, which assesses the appeal of Canadian cities to skilled workers and mobile population, gave the cities of Vaughan, Calgary and Edmonton an A grade for a strong economy.

While I and the residents of my Thornhill riding have known for years that the city of Vaughan is a great place to live, work and raise a family, I am pleased to see that the city is earning the recognition it deserves.

My congratulations to Mayor Linda Jackson, the city manager and all members of the city's financial management staff on these fine achievements.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Glen R. Murray: It is my pleasure to speak about an issue that is very important to my constituents and very important to me.

For many years, I have worked hard to deliver affordable housing to those who need it most. I believe that elected representatives can work together with private sector partners and community groups to make sure that every person has a key in their pocket to a safe place to live at the end of the day.

I am proud to be part of a government that is spending more money on affordable housing than we ever have in the history of our province. Under the affordable housing agreement, alongside the federal government we are investing \$1.2 billion in affordable housing. Some of the biggest affordable housing projects in Ontario are right now in my constituency of Toronto Centre. Seven hundred and eighty affordable housing units are being built in Regent Park, and we are providing almost \$6.5 million for 130 home ownership units and 80 home ownership loans.

There is still work to be done, but our government is committed to moving forward on this issue and helping all Ontarians find a safe place to live.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm rising today in response to the needs of the agricultural sector in our economy. I'm concerned that this government is so busy struggling with

its debt and tax controversies that it doesn't have enough time to recognize agriculture.

Agriculture needs farm-friendly policies at Queen's Park—and not struggling to control red tape. Agriculture needs fair compensation to farmers impacted by government-imposed regulations not of their making. Farmers need a say in the rules and regulations that make it harder for them to do their jobs as producers of food for our tables in Ontario and indeed around the world. Many farmers are looking for a workable risk management plan for non-supply-managed commodities, a new long-term risk management initiative with stable and sustainable funding for the industry.

In recent weeks, I've had the privilege of meeting and speaking with many farm and agribusiness leaders in my riding of Durham, people like Charles Stevens of Wilmot Orchards, who is also a director on the OFVGA; Kirk Kemp and Mike Gibson, who are the new owners and operators of Algoma Orchards, a \$35-million business; Ted Eng, an Uxbridge councillor and organic farmer; and young farmers and leaders: Scott Nesbitt, Scott Swain, Joe Hickson from the Grain Farmers of Ontario, Andrew Frew and many others whom I have no time to mention.

I'd urge this government not to ignore the needs of agriculture and to work with this community to create sound policies that are not just good for farmers but—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Scarborough Southwest.

FAMILY DAY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak on Family Day, which was just celebrated yesterday.

The theme that resonates with Family Day is love. I can think of no better tribute than having to celebrate Family Day around St. Valentine's Day.

The McGuinty government was committed to add this holiday in February within the first year of its new mandate and ensured that it became law on October 12, 2007.

This is the third year we are celebrating Family Day. Years from now, generations will come to judge the wisdom of having a holiday between New Year's and Easter, which is usually a cold, dark part of the year. As I stand today here in this Legislature, I foresee that 50 or even 100 years from now, future generations will look back to the day when Family Day became law, and pay homage to the Premier and this government for the vision and wisdom in dedicating the third Monday in February of every year as Family Day.

Family Day is also celebrated in other provinces as a statutory holiday—in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Manitoba, it's called Louis Riel Day. In PEI, it's called Islander Day.

Family Day is a day to spend with family and those we love. Our families here in Ontario take part in all kinds of activities on Family Day, and this past year was no exception. Many of us visited museums and art galleries, or stayed with our families doing arts and crafts or even watching the Olympics on television.

In conclusion, Family Day will continue to grow as the years go by and will continue to be an important holiday for all Ontarians.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Ted Arnott: Members of the council of the town of Erin are urgently seeking a meeting with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This is a reasonable request that the minister cannot brush off. The issue is simple, even if the solution is somewhat more complex: slow ambulance response times when residents of Erin call in an emergency.

Just days ago it was reported in the Erin Advocate, the community's fine local newspaper, that a woman waited over an hour for an ambulance on a frigid January night. She had fallen in the parking lot of the Erin community centre. They called 911. The dispatcher advised that she should not be moved but instead covered with blankets, pending the arrival of the ambulance. Again, it took more than an hour for the ambulance to arrive. How could this be allowed to happen? Imagine if this happened in the city.

This is totally unacceptable to me as the MPP for Wellington–Halton Hills, to our PC caucus, and it should be unacceptable to the Minister of Health. It should also be unacceptable to the council of the city of Guelph, which has been the ambulance provider for the county of Wellington and the city of Guelph.

Action in this case is not an option; it is a necessity.

For a start, we need the active involvement of the Minister of Health. Erin council representatives are planning to attend the ROMA-Good Roads Conference next week. We need her to help broker a solution which improves response times for ambulance service in east Wellington.

I quote the Erin Advocate from February 10: "Something must be done. We hope the minister listens well, and finds a way to—"

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from London–Fanshawe.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My riding of London–Fanshawe is known to be friendly and accommodating to residents and guests alike. We are lucky to have services for all of our citizens, with a focus on seniors.

Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting Kensington Village, a retirement community that has benefited from our government's investment in long-term-care beds. I was accompanied by several community leaders as we toured the unique home and announced the rebuilding of 128 of their beds.

I was pleased when the decision was made to re-develop 4,100 beds across Ontario to better accommodate our elderly population. Not only would it impact our seniors, but it would also create and sustain 4,000 jobs here in Ontario. It is important for Ontarians to know that

our government is investing in the growth of a local economy.

Kensington Village has been a landmark in London since 1983. Mr. Peter Schlegel and family have been providing exceptional services to London's senior citizens, and I would like to congratulate their success and efforts. Together, it's our responsibility as public servants to ensure their quality of life and dignity.

Thank you for allowing me to make this statement.

1510

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Howard Hampton: The First Nations of Fort Hope, Neskantaga, Summer Beaver, Webequie, Kasabonika Lake and Marten Falls are all located quite close to what is perhaps the hottest mining prospecting territory in the whole world, called the Ring of Fire, in northern Ontario. Indeed, mining companies, mining exploration companies, mining development companies from around the world are scrambling to get access to the Ring of Fire. Some would say that this is great news; I think it's good news. But the First Nations have some questions they'd like to raise.

This government promises a new relationship with First Nations. Many of these mining exploration and mining development companies refuse absolutely to talk to First Nations. The Minister of Natural Resources recently received a letter from the chief of Neskantaga, who pointed out that this government was allowing an airstrip to be built north of Marten Falls First Nation when none of the environmental rules or natural resource rules—and no consultation with First Nations had taken place. Indeed, a 200-kilometre railway is being mapped and planned, with no consultation with First Nations.

Many of these First Nations have bent over backwards to work with this government and work with the mining industry. They're wondering: When is this new relationship going to begin with the McGuinty government?

KINDNESS WEEK

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It gives me great pleasure today to mark Kindness Week in Ontario. I think some of the members already enjoyed the cookies earlier today.

Kindness Week is a very special idea that has flourished in my community of Ottawa, and which I, along with the MPPs from Nickel Belt and Kitchener–Waterloo, had the privilege of formalizing in this House this past fall with a motion.

If I may quote the motion: "Simple acts of kindness can have a profound impact on individuals and communities, and therefore the spirit of Family Day should be augmented by declaring the third week of every February as Kindness Week in the province of Ontario to help strengthen a culture of compassion, thoughtfulness and kindness, and to counter a prevailing tendency towards cynicism."

It is my sincere hope that many of you members of this House and members of our communities will bring

Kindness Week to your community and experience the amazing things that can come from simple acts of kindness to others.

So often in our busy lives and growing communities, it is too easy to let the opportunity to do something nice for somebody pass us by. Yet we may not fully appreciate how far one kind gesture can go to making our communities better places to live, in strengthening the connections that we share with our friends, neighbours and strangers.

I encourage you to visit kindottawa.ca to see how Kindness Week can be a success in your community.

I'm also very pleased to partner with a great organization that transitions unemployed Ontarians to a position of employment and empowerment by assisting them with suitable business attire for job interviews or new careers. Seventy-five different service organizations across the city referred their clients to this service to help them break fashion barriers to gaining meaningful employment. Donations of clean and ready-to-wear business clothes and accessories can be left at the Speaker's office.

Choose to be kind.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Our government has entered into an extremely important agreement with a consortium led by Samsung that will help Ontario become a global green energy hub.

This agreement will energize our renewable manufacturing industry by bringing four green manufacturing plants to Ontario, producing wind and solar energy infrastructure. This will create more than 16,000 jobs over six years in the manufacturing plants as well as during the construction, installation and operation of renewable energy projects.

In addition, the green energy produced as a result of this agreement will be approximately 110 million megawatt hours of emissions-free electricity. It's enough power to supply every home in Ontario for three years.

This will preclude the release of 40 megatonnes of carbon monoxide in the atmosphere that would have been released using other forms of energy production. That's equivalent to removing every car off Ontario roads for one year.

This agreement is an important investment that will establish Ontario as the leader in green energy manufacturing in North America, creating jobs for Ontarians and protecting our environment for generations to come. This will be a proud legacy of this agreement.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment the following reports were tabled:

On January 4, 2010, the 2008 annual report from the chief medical officer of health of Ontario, entitled Infectious Disease Prevention and Control in Ontario: Continuing the Investment in Public Health 2008;

On January 11, 2010, the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the by-election in the electoral district of St. Paul's.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the Clerk received the February 1, 2010, 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

BRITISH HOME CHILD DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR DES PETITS IMMIGRÉS BRITANNIQUES

Mr. Brownell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 241, An Act to proclaim British Home Child Day / Projet de loi 241, Loi proclamant le Jour des petits immigrants britanniques.

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. Jim Brownell: The British Home Child Day Act will set aside September 28 of each year to recognize and honour the contributions made to the province of Ontario by the more than 100,000 British home children who came from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland to settle here in Ontario from the orphaned and destitute homes of those countries. They came here to work as domestics and farm labourers, and they certainly provided valuable contributions to the social and economic fibre of Ontario.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Mr. Prue be replaced by Mr. Tabuns and Mr. Shurman be replaced by Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka;

On the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Tabuns be replaced by Mr. Prue;

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Arnott be replaced by Mr. Shurman.

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

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we also have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following change be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Caplan exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Caplan assumes ballot item number 60 and Mr. Ramsay assumes ballot item number 80; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item number 60.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

DROITS DES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I stand in the House today as the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It's a privilege for me to stand in this House.

Earlier today, I tabled a motion on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, calling upon the government of Canada to reconsider its position on the declaration.

This declaration is the result of more than 20 years of discussions within the UN system. As is appropriate, aboriginal representatives played key roles in its development.

Plus tôt dans la journée, j'ai déposé une motion qui se rapporte à la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones, pour que l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario demande au gouvernement du Canada de reconsidérer sa position sur la déclaration.

La déclaration sur les droits des peuples autochtones est l'aboutissement de plus de 20 années de délibérations au sein de l'Organisation des Nations Unies. Comme il se

doit, les porte-parole des collectivités autochtones ont joué un rôle clé dans sa création.

Aboriginal people, communities and leaders in Ontario and throughout Canada ascribe significant importance to the declaration as a foundation for fair and harmonious relations.

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the declaration on September 13, 2007. Canada was one of only four nations to vote against it. In April 2009, the Labor government in Australia announced its endorsement of the declaration. Shortly after, New Zealand and the United States indicated that they are reconsidering their positions. Canada is the only country unwilling as of yet to reassess its stance and now stands alone.

1520

On December 17, 2009, Premier McGuinty wrote Prime Minister Harper, asking the government of Canada to reconsider its position. Ontario recognizes and affirms the constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada within Canada's constitutional and treaty framework.

First Nation, Metis and Inuit have made enormous contributions to this country, yet aboriginal people often do not share in this prosperity. Stark socio-economic disparities exist between aboriginal people and others in Canada. Overall, aboriginal people in Ontario, including almost 300,000 First Nation, Metis and Inuit, are less affluent than non-aboriginal people. They do not attain the same levels of education and they suffer many ailments and diseases at higher rates. They are more often victims of violent crime and are overrepresented in our custodial institutions. This should not be. We need to do better and Ontario is doing better. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the rest of the Ontario government are working together with aboriginal people.

Much has been accomplished in the last couple of years. Last fall, Ontario hosted federal, provincial, territorial and aboriginal leaders to discuss ways to address the socio-economic gap. And just last month, Ontario, with the Chiefs of Ontario and the federal government, hosted my former colleague in this post, Brad Duguid—a current colleague—in the first-ever Ontario First Nations economic forum. It was an enormous success, with the promise of more economic opportunities for First Nations and indeed greater economic opportunities for all Ontarians.

A final example: The scene of those tragic events in Ipperwash was the setting for a joyful reconciliation last year as Ontario and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point celebrated agreement on a process to return Ipperwash park to the First Nation.

These are only examples. With our aboriginal partners, our work continues. The McGuinty government remains committed to working with aboriginal people across this province to improve relationships and opportunities. A commitment by the government of Canada to review Canada's position on the UN declaration within the context of Canada's constitutional and treaty framework and related jurisprudence would be a positive

step. It would send a clear signal that Canada stands behind the values it advocates on the world stage.

So we, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, call upon the government of Canada to undertake a review of its position on the declaration within the context of Canada's constitutional and treaty framework and related jurisprudence.

I thank you for the time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the statement that the government has brought forward today and to respond to the new Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. First of all, I wish to congratulate him on this new role and his new responsibility. I sincerely hope he will dedicate the time, effort and leadership that this portfolio requires.

Our caucus will carefully review and consult on this particular matter, and when the debate takes place, we will respond in a more fulsome way. Certainly the minister indicated in his speech just now that the resolution was passed by the United Nations almost two and a half years ago, so it makes us question the timing. It's interesting that the government would bring this up at this time. Clearly, the political objective of the government is to take a difficult issue and try to focus attention on what the federal government should be doing as opposed to drawing attention to what the provincial government has not done.

Simple demographics, among other factors, tell us how important the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the work that's done are, particularly in terms of education and economic development. More than 242,000 aboriginal Canadians live in Ontario, the largest First Nations population in the country. Our province's aboriginal population is young. Over 26% are 15 years of age or younger. It's also a growing population. Between 2001 and 2006, it has grown by 20% for the First Nation population and a pronounced 52% for the Metis population. This is a good thing because aboriginal Canadians have so much to contribute and we need their talent, skill and culture.

Yet the McGuinty government's lack of meaningful action has made it difficult for these Ontarians to realize their full potential. Certainly during this government's time in office, aboriginal communities have heard a great many promises. Promises in themselves, however, do not lead to tangible results. Promises in themselves do not lead to an improved quality of life. Promises unkept amount to betrayals.

To ensure that betrayal is not this government's legacy, the new minister has a great deal of work to do. He has much to do not only on the substance of the issues affecting aboriginals in Ontario, but also to convince them, and indeed to convince this Legislature, that this government is truly serious. Grand Chief Stan Beardy, for one, appears to be very disappointed by what he sees. Following the Premier's cabinet shuffle, the Wawatay News quoted him as follows: "We are disappointed that the Premier doesn't see aboriginal issues worthy of

having a stand-alone minister ... now the messaging seems to be for some reason the Premier does not seem to see First Nation issues as being important." Coming from one of our province's most respected First Nations leaders, this is a devastating indictment of this government's attitude.

Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse is another highly respected aboriginal leader with concerns about this government's approach. Chief Toulouse says, according to the same newspaper, "It will be essential for" this government "to maintain the commitments as previously expressed ... to forge a stronger relationship based on trust and mutual respect."

Of course this government's track record on following through on their commitments is nothing short of disappointing. It's part of a pattern from this government. Instead of initiating real action they choose to initiate endless talk. They raise expectations which are later dashed. They make promises to listen and then ignore what they hear. The HST is a prime example. This new provincial tax, which we know will negatively impact the household budgets of all Ontarians, will have an especially adverse effect on First Nations communities.

It seems like every week I receive letters from First Nations communities expressing opposition to the HST. In fact, I received one today from Chief Douglas Daybutch of the Mississauga First Nation in Blind River. In his letter, the chief makes a strong case against the HST:

"We, along with our other First Nation communities with Anishinabek Nation territory, never gave up, ceded or relinquished our treaty and aboriginal rights to be tax-exempt.

The HST, as proposed, takes away that right. It does not provide for point-of-sale tax exemption for our people—which currently exists within the Ontario retail tax system. All purchases made by First Nations people are potentially taxable, especially if the purchased goods are not delivered to the reserve."

The chief offers a strongly worded conclusion: "It is unfortunate that our people are yet again forced to defend our rights against governments who choose to ignore them."

Are those the words of someone who has been consulted? Are those the words of someone whose views and concerns have been addressed or even respected? These letters are consistent in this respect: They object not only to this government's new sales tax grab but also take issue with its approach, its lack of respect and consideration.

I'll say again, this minister and his government have a lot of work to do. Yet the McGuinty government can't convince one of its most agreeable media outlets that it's taking its job seriously—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Clearly there are people who are celebrating this announcement today, and I would imagine most of them are in the minister's office as we watch this particular statement today. I'm sure that

they're excited because finally they've got something they can work on with their minister when it comes to the issues that are facing our First Nations.

I think what probably happened goes something like this: The minister is appointed—he's a good man. I know Mr. Bentley. He's an honourable member, and I don't mean this in a disparaging way, but I just want to say his attention is somewhat pulled in other directions as AG. That's why I think there should be one stand-alone Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, but that's for another debate. But I think what happened was this: The minister said, "Okay. Get ready to brief me. I want to be able to do something that shows I'm going to do something positive when it comes to First Nations in Ontario." And so he said, "What issues do you think that I could be doing as minister?" "Oh, Minister," said his staff, "you can deal with the HST because of the exemption rule when it comes to how PST and HST is going to be applied when the new HST rules come in." "Oh no. We can't do that. That's clearly something the Premier doesn't want me to do," he said.

"What about revenue-sharing? How about we deal with that issue that First Nations have been trying to get moved on the agenda for some time that says whenever there's economic development within their regions such as a mine, a forestry activity or water development, that there's a mechanism for revenue-sharing?" He said, "Well, I don't think the Premier wants me to do that one either. Is there something else?" They said, "What about land use planning? First Nations would like to see land use planning issues dealt with so they can have a real say about what's going to happen on their traditional territories when it comes to development on their traditional territories." "Well, I don't think the Premier wants me to do that either."

1530

"Well, what about infrastructure? I hear this Bisson guy and this Hampton guy come in the House, and they talk about 20 to 25 people living in a house in most communities in far northern Ontario, everywhere from Moose Factory all the way up to KI into Big Trout Lake and others." "Well, no, we don't have the money for that one either. But is there anything that I can do?"

Then the minister said, "What about this declaration that I've heard about"—in regard to the United Nations, which wanted to pass a declaration on the rights of First Nations, and Canada is not doing anything to accept it. "What if we do that? Because if we did that, not only would I be seen as doing something positive, I could attack the Tories."

I've got to tell you, this minister is absolutely brilliant. He knew exactly what he was doing. If they're celebrating somewhere today, it's in the minister's office. Finally, they've got themselves something to do.

Listen, in all honesty, Minister, I know you to be an honourable member, and I'm having a little bit of fun with you now, but it isn't all that funny. The reality is, there are very pressing issues that face First Nations across this province. A lot of those issues are in the

control of the provincial government. If you talk to your colleague next to you, the Solicitor General, he will tell you how Nishnawbe-Aski policing is in deep need of infrastructure investments in order to offer just basic police services to the people that live in First Nations. What we've got is the same approach by the Solicitor General, who says, "I'm prepared to put up our half"—which is about \$14 million—"provided that the federal government puts in their half." We can't be playing that game. We either recognize the fact that First Nations are citizens of the province of Ontario or we don't. If we agree—and I say this is the case—that First Nations are citizens of the province of Ontario, we as a provincial Legislature and the government of Ontario have a responsibility to do what it can within its means to deal with the very pressing issues that are faced by First Nations across this province.

Donc, il y a beaucoup à faire. On sait que les Nations de la province de l'Ontario regardent le gouvernement provincial pour trouver des solutions aux questions et aux tâches qui concernent les Premières Nations de cette province. On sait qu'il y a beaucoup de problèmes quand ça vient aux logements dans les communautés, quand ça vient à l'éducation dans les communautés, quand ça vient à la question du partage des revenus sur les projets. Il y a beaucoup de dossiers que ce gouvernement provincial pourrait se prononcer dessus, et j'encouragerais le nouveau ministre responsable de ce portefeuille de répondre à ces questions-là, et de non seulement prendre une position politique telle qu'on voit aujourd'hui.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm very pleased to present these 2,300 petitions, and to thank Fran Coleman, a councillor from Huntsville, who played a large role in getting these petitions to do with health care. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare have undertaken an operational audit to identify efficiencies and reduce costs; and

"Whereas we recognize that the status quo is not an option; and

"Whereas rehab services are of paramount concern to the residents of the region where income levels exclude them from accessing other alternatives; and

"Whereas the deficit recovery plan will not balance the budget;

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

"That the Minister of Health provide additional operational funding of 5% amounting to \$3.4 million to ensure the continuation of services as described in the deficit reduction plan submitted to the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN dated January 29, 2010."

I support this petition and I'm pleased to sign it.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Dave Levac: This is a petition from the Brant county branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society, 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.”

I sign this petition with full support and hand it to Haleigh, our page.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents; one of them is Joan Randall and another one is Mary Metrailler. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province’s underserviced area program,” often referred to as 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” like Bowmanville, Uxbridge or Scugog; 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 sign, support and endorse this and present it to one of the new pages, Amy.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a number of petitions; some were signed by members of the North Sherbrooke Historical Society. They read 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, 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.

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” the Hospitals of Ontario Pension Plan and the OPSEU trust pension plan “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” the Hospitals of Ontario Pension Plan or OPSEU trust.

Obviously I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: Again, I have a number of petitions, some of them signed by members of the Collingwood and District Historical Society. They read as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas protecting and preserving Ontario’s cemeteries is a shared responsibility and the foundation of a civilized society; and

“Whereas failure to safeguard one of our last remaining authentic cultural heritage resources, Ontario’s inactive cemeteries, would be disastrous for the continuity of the historical record and our collective culture in this province;

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

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

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

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) 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, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over \$400,000 ... electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than \$30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

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

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

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

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

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SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: It’s good to be back in the Legislature. It’s also good to stand up and read a petition. I’d like to thank Edna Toth, our good friend from the Peel Poverty Action Group, for having submitted this petition. It reads as follows, and it’s addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“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 social service 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; 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.”

It’s an excellent petition. I’m in agreement with it. I’m pleased to sign it and to send it to the table with page Nevan.

CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETIES

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

“Whereas in 2008-09, the Children’s Aid Society of Simcoe County (CAS) served 4,356 families and 10,890 children, and also conducted 3,159 protection investigations; and

“Whereas the CAS currently has 399 children in their care; and

“Whereas in July 2009 the McGuinty government cut funding to the Simcoe county CAS by 10.4% this year, which is \$5.6 million less than the amount the CAS requires to operate; and

“Whereas, beginning in February 2010, the children’s aid society will have exhausted all of its cash flow allocations, including a \$2-million line of credit, and is now facing decisions on which bills it can now pay, including consideration of payments to the 174 foster homes which have children in their care;

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

“That Premier Dalton McGuinty should immediately review the situation at the Children’s Aid Society of Simcoe County and ensure that the province provides for families and children who need critical government support to protect children and families from harm.”

I’ve signed this petition and I certainly agree with it.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have petitions, some of them signed by members of the Toronto and Area Council of Women, and they read 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 the petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks’ table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mr. Bentley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I’ll ask that I share my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Willowdale.

I’m very pleased to be able to speak to Bill 231, which at its heart is a further improvement and enhancement to the heart of our democratic process, the heart of a process whereby we elect the members of this House, the heart of a process whereby we enable people in the province of Ontario to express their will on who should govern them—and these Election Act amendments are designed to ensure that more people in more circumstances can do so more conveniently. They are a continuation of the efforts that we have made over the past six and a half—almost seven—years to strengthen the democratic process in this province.

I want to say at the very beginning that the specific amendments that are before the House now are in large measure a result of an all-party legislative committee. Let us be clear that an all-party legislative committee, with my colleague and parliamentary assistant David Zimmer, along with Greg Sorbara, Howard Hampton and Norm Sterling, worked very hard to come up with improvements and amendments to the legislation. I’m pleased to say that the recommendations of that committee have been substantially and significantly adopted and are reflected in this legislation. I would like to thank, regardless of party affiliation or other and additional views, all those members representing all parties for their work on this particular piece of legislation.

These amendments related to the Election Act and the Election Finances Act are about providing Ontarians with more opportunities to vote and increasing accessibility

for all voters. It’s about ensuring that everybody has a voice and the opportunity to express that voice, and that there’s an opportunity for Ontarians to exercise their right to vote.

Il s’agit de veiller à ce que tout le monde ait voix au chapitre et puisse s’exprimer, de veiller à ce que toutes les Ontariennes et tous les Ontariens aient toutes les occasions possibles d’exercer leur droit de voter.

The bill would deliver three key changes to improve the election system for voting. My colleague the MPP for Willowdale, my parliamentary assistant, will speak in more detail about a number of the changes, but I just wanted to highlight three key changes.

It will increase the opportunities for Ontarians to cast a ballot. For example, voters will be able to vote by special ballot, including voting by mail or taking a ballot to the returning office, giving people more opportunities to cast that ballot.

Secondly—and I know, on this issue, that before he took his seat in the House, I had conversations with the MPP for Toronto Centre–Rosedale on this very issue. Secondly, it will increase opportunities for persons with disabilities to vote. This is going to be done by allowing Ontario’s Chief Electoral Officer to introduce, where they believe appropriate, new technologies such as voting machines to assist persons with disabilities to cast their ballot privately and independently at returning office advance polls.

Thirdly, these amendments would give the Chief Electoral Officer more flexibility to design a voting process that enhances service delivery and ensures that elections keep pace with and are responsive to the needs of Ontarians. Ontarians change with the times. Ontarians are often ahead of the times. We need to make sure that the process by which Ontarians express their democratic voice changes as well. What better approach than to give flexibility to the Chief Electoral Officer to meet the requirements, the exigencies of the time?

All of this would be done while maintaining the integrity of our voting system. Each of these proposed changes is significant in its own right. They reflect, as I say, the all-party committee, but they are part of a process that we have undertaken, from the time we became government in 2003, to strengthen our democratic electoral system.

You’ll recall that in our first mandate we introduced—and have adhered to—fixed-term election dates. So we not only introduced them; we actually followed through on them, which is always a good thing. That eliminates political considerations in the calling of a vote. I know my colleagues opposite like to know when the elections will be called. All the people of Ontario would like to know when they’re going to vote so that it doesn’t become a political football that can be exercised, thrown or kicked according to the whim of the government of the day.

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In that same bill, we sent a very strong message and took a very important step: We said that we would strengthen our system by preserving the 11 northern

ridings in the Legislature for the province of Ontario. That contrasts with the changes that were made federally.

I know, in speaking to my colleagues and having travelled throughout the north—in fact, just last week I was in Thunder Bay and Dryden in my role as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I was visiting the First Nations communities in Wabigoon Lake, Eagle Lake and North Spirit Lake. I'm aware of the challenges of geography, the challenges of climate that are most significantly expressed in the north, whether you're flying in, such as to North Spirit Lake, or whether you're driving enormous distances. Speak to my colleague from Manitoulin, Mike Brown, about the enormous distances from one end of his riding to the other.

It is important that we ensure a very strong, democratic voice throughout the province of Ontario, with particular emphasis on those areas where diminishing it could take place by reducing the number of ridings. I'm pleased that we took those steps to maintain 11 ridings in the north.

We also established a citizens' assembly. The people of Ontario had the benefit during the last election of passing judgment on the recommendations of that citizens' assembly, a citizens' assembly drawn from all over the province of Ontario to get their advice on how we might change our electoral system. They provided that advice and we put the advice to the people of Ontario. We put it there as a separate ballot item to the people of Ontario for the people to pass judgment on. The people had that opportunity and they passed judgment. They said no, but they passed judgment. At the end of the day, we had a process that was open, that was free, that was fair, that was democratic and gave the people of Ontario an opportunity to express their views on how they would elect people in the future.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That's open government.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: That is open government, as my colleague from Sudbury rightly says, and that is a democratic government.

I want to talk about some of the other changes that we had made over the course of our mandate. These are, as I say, the second package of reforms.

I spoke about fixed-term elections. Of course, during the last mandate we also passed changes to our election legislation which increased substantially the number of advance poll days. It's hard to find a day now without an advance poll on it, so there are opportunities for Ontarians to cast their ballot.

We expanded the number of voting hours. Often in years past, you'd get into that situation where people would have difficulty juggling the daily and family and other responsibilities of work etc. with their wish to cast their ballot. Well, no longer. We're open many, many hours.

The Chief Electoral Officer was given authority to test new voting methods in by-elections. Those additional voting methods, I understand, have been tested, and it is the fact that they have been tested and tested successfully

which has given us the ability to make some of these proposed changes to this election legislation.

The changes that we are proposing to enable persons with disabilities to have greater access to the foundation of our society, the democratic process, continue a voice that we, as a government, have raised since 2003 in support of those with disabilities, with the passing of the Ontarians with disabilities act in 2005 and with the very hard work of my colleague Minister Meilleur in ensuring that Ontarians with disabilities have the type of access to all institutions in society that many of us take for granted.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: She's a real champion.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: She has been an enormous champion to improve access for persons with disabilities. These proposed changes to our election legislation continue the very strong steps that we have taken as a government to say that all should have access; all should have the right that many of us, as I say, take for granted.

We are building a more accessible Ontario. A more accessible Ontario is a stronger Ontario. A more accessible Ontario is not just a better Ontario for those with disabilities, who will have the opportunity to more fully participate in all of society's institutions, who will have the opportunity to more completely achieve their potential as a society, but it makes us a stronger society, because a society in which every Ontarian can reach their potential is the only society in which this province can reach its potential.

I am very pleased with these proposed changes and I would commend these proposed changes to my colleagues in all parts of the House. They do, after all, reflect the work of an all-party committee. I commend these changes and the ones that my colleague the MPP for Willowdale will speak to in just a moment as an important step and another step in this government's determination to strengthen the democratic foundation of our society by strengthening the important, essential election legislation that guides and shapes the exercise of our democratic voice.

With that, I'll turn the floor over to my colleague, my parliamentary assistant, who has worked so hard on these changes as well as the other Ministry of the Attorney General initiatives that we have: the MPP for Willowdale, David Zimmer.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: It was an honour for me to serve on the Select Committee on Elections alongside members of all three political parties, and it's truly gratifying to see our recommendations come to light in this bill.

The work of our committee was motivated by a simple but crucial principle: Ontarians want a government that works for them. One of the most important things we can do to make sure that successive governments—not just this government; successive governments—remain rooted in this basic principle is to ensure that the legislation, the rules and the processes we have in place to govern our elections are modern, are effective and are

efficient. That's why it's so very important for us to take a look at our election laws every so often with fresh eyes, with the experience of the last few elections under our belt.

The fact is that this is a system that we've inherited, a system with a long history rooted in a past that does not always match the reality of the society we live in today, no matter how well it served our society in the past. The work of the committee and the content of this bill are focused on ensuring that our election legislation is fully in line with the contemporary needs and expectations of all Ontarians—and I stress the “contemporary” needs and expectations.

There can be no question that each and every citizen of this province has the opportunity to exercise his or her democratic right to vote, because the truth is that all political parties and all citizens have a profound and fundamental interest in seeing that elections keep up with the times while ensuring that the integrity of our election process is never in doubt.

This legislation would help voters in three key areas. First, it would increase opportunities for Ontarians to cast a ballot; second, it would increase access to voting for persons with disabilities; and third, it would enhance service delivery in the voting process across the board.

I would like to start by spending a bit of time on discussing how the voting experience would be diversified and improved in these areas by Bill 231.

1600

As the Attorney General has explained, one of the key accomplishments of this bill would be to increase voting opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities. Our government is especially proud of this aspect of the bill, which builds on the legacy we are creating through the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Bill 231 would give the Chief Electoral Officer the ability to direct the use of accessible voting equipment. Ontario would be the first among the provinces and the federal government to permit the use of voting machines that allow persons with disabilities to vote privately and independently. This would be a significant improvement.

The bill would also provide persons with disabilities the option of requesting that the election officers make a home visit to assist with the special ballot application and with voting. Indeed, the bill would improve the voting experience for a broad range of Ontarians who are unable to vote on election day or in person during the election period: people such as snowbirds, seniors and military persons who are out of the jurisdiction at the time of the election—as well, of course, as persons with disabilities.

This would be accomplished through the introduction of special ballots which include both voting by mail and taking a ballot to the returning office in person. Special ballots would allow Ontario to eliminate the current system of proxy voting, which does not allow electors to vote independently and, therefore, undermines the secrecy of the ballot.

Another key reform is that this bill would significantly increase the flexibility afforded to Ontario's Chief

Electoral Officer, which should make election service delivery better. I would particularly like to cite two examples in this regard. First, the Chief Electoral Officer would be provided with the authority to modify the voting process in order to improve the voting process and the voting experience. In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer would be given the flexibility to determine the hours and dates for advance polls.

This bill would also provide more flexibility for post-secondary students by allowing them to choose whether they want to vote in the electoral district where they reside temporarily while attending an educational institution or where they reside permanently—for example, with their family.

All of these initiatives are supported by measures that ensure that the integrity of the election system remains strong, such as the requirement that voters show identification. These reforms to increase opportunities to cast a ballot to enhance access and to improve service delivery would be an important and significant step forward for Ontario voters and Ontario elections.

This bill matches the increase in flexibility for improved service delivery with an equal focus on increasing the professionalization of service delivery, because, just as it is imperative that we do what it takes to provide ample opportunities for Ontarians to cast a ballot, so too is it incumbent upon us to do what it takes to better ensure that election officials are sufficiently experienced and appropriately qualified.

That's why this bill would depoliticize the appointments of returning officers and poll workers. This includes eliminating the existing requirement that poll workers be appointed from lists provided by candidates. This bill would also establish new authority for the Chief Electoral Officer over appointments and remuneration of election officials so that these officials are more directly accountable to the Chief Electoral Officer.

For example, terms for returning officers would be introduced so that current appointments would expire in 2013. New returning officer appointments would be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer. Subsequent appointments would last for 10 years. The Chief Electoral Officer would be permitted flexibility to establish fees, including wage levels for election workers. This would better ensure that the election officials are sufficiently experienced and appropriately qualified. It would also reduce delays in staffing and training poll workers.

With responsibility comes accountability, so the legislation would also modernize the Chief Electoral Officer's financial accountability for election funding. The Chief Electoral Officer would make an annual submission to the Board of Internal Economy in which he would establish fees for election officials. The board would have the authority to accept, reject or modify the proposed fees.

Another area of this bill that I want to touch on today is the proposals to modernize election finance rules by providing more convenient contribution options that

reflect modern banking practices and emerging financial transaction technologies. Under the current system, contributions exceeding \$25 are only permitted by cheque, money order or an individual's credit card. This bill would bring us into the 21st century by allowing the use of corporate credit cards, debit cards, online contributions and electronic transfers. This would be accompanied by a new centralized electronic management of receipting, whereby central political parties would issue receipts for all contributions to the party, constituency associations and candidates. The chief financial officers would continue to be responsible for verifying the eligibility of the contributors.

These changes to the finance rules are all about modernizing a system that currently inconveniences some Ontarians who may want to get involved in the election process by contributing to a political party or a candidate. The initiatives that I've outlined in this bill today are design to make elections more accessible and to ensure more integrity and greater transparency in the voting process.

Ensuring that our elections are governed by modern, effective and relevant legislation is not a task motivated by the political priorities of the day. It is motivated by the core democratic principles that will endure far longer than any succession of governments or political parties. It is motivated by the simple principle that I mentioned at the beginning of these remarks: the belief that Ontarians want a government that works for them.

I believe that this bill would help bring our election laws up to date so that more Ontarians can participate in the voting process and so that more Ontarians will see that the voting process is infused by the highest standards of integrity. I urge all my colleagues of all political parties in this chamber to support this legislation.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: It gives me pleasure to rise in the Legislature and tell my colleagues from the other side that we in the Conservative Party will be supporting this bill because we, too, believe that it's high time that we took a look at some of the things that we in Ontario can do for voters to see to it that all of us, regardless of political stripe, get the support of the people who really want to support us and that we make it possible for those people to come out and express their support by casting a ballot one way or the other. Bill 231 does that.

Very particularly in my thoughts are people who are categorized as snowbirds and people who do serve in the military and people who are disabled. Those are people who deserve the vote as well.

As I recall, voter turnout in general elections here in the province of Ontario runs anywhere between 50% and 60%, depending. It would be nice to see it be, to look at one example, something like the Australian turnout, which tends to be upwards of 90%. In Australia, as most members, I think, know—and some may not—there's a fine levied against you if you fail to cast your ballot. I'm not advocating that, but I can tell you that in discussions

I've had with friends, colleagues and acquaintances from time to time, the idea is not something that escapes their thoughts.

One of the things that I'd like to put on record, however, is that despite the fact that the Conservative caucus does support this bill and will be voting for this bill, it would be nice to have seen the bill cover some aspects that are not mentioned: to wit, the financing of elections by third parties. I think we can all agree in this chamber that that happens. It may not be financing of elections per se, but it is advertising directed in support of one party or another by third parties who have a vested interest. So it would be nice to see, when this bill goes to committee, some reference made to that.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a pleasure to stand up, having listened to my colleagues and their waxing eloquent on the merits of Bill 231. They spoke quite long, but really what they're saying is that this bill, although it does contain some enviable and admirable provisions, doesn't really say a whole lot. It doesn't go to the heart of the matter of what is wrong with elections in Ontario. It goes in part to allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to make decisions; it goes in part to the accommodation of students who are living outside of their home polls; it goes in part to depoliticizing the process of hiring poll workers; but it doesn't do very much.

There was some comment about disability issues and how they were proud that they were going to address the disabled community. I will have a great deal to say about that when it is my opportunity, but I want to say to them bluntly and forthrightly: I don't think you listened to the disabled community at all. Had you listened to the disabled community, the fiasco of one of the polls in the recent by-election in Toronto Centre would not have happened, where a person showed up in a wheelchair and was not able to vote. They had to be carried down the stairs. That is something that was supposed to have been dealt with, that was asked to be dealt with and that was not dealt with, and simply putting aside an opportunity for people to go to an advance poll to vote with some kind of new electronic device is not going to cut it. The majority of people want and need to vote on election day, and that includes the disabled community as well as the non-disabled community. It includes people who consider it a right to weigh all of the factors right up until election day so that they can have their minds made up on that day, not some days, weeks or months in advance, and to go to a place that is secluded and is not necessarily the same for all electors.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's my pleasure to add a couple of minutes of comments on Bill 231.

You know, we could argue here that this is not enough, that it doesn't go far enough and that we forgot this. The fact of the matter is that we're making some

progress. When it comes to election day, we're always criticized. The comments are that the poll is in the wrong place or that it's hard to get to. Frankly, as legislators, we never really put a process in place to give those directions to the people who are doing this kind of work. So I think this is an excellent start, and when I say "excellent," it's because we've had a multi-party committee look at issues, speak to folks across the province and collectively come out with recommendations which the ministry has then put into legislation.

I remember in my last two elections, 2003 and 2007, it wasn't uncommon when I was out knocking on doors, as all of us have been, to have people say, "Well, that election date"—whatever date it is—"is challenging for me." We used to use proxy voting, so you had to explain the proxy and all that kind of stuff. It was very cumbersome. In some cases, it was in schools which were frankly not accessible. Now it's giving the Chief Electoral Officer the authority to assess those challenges and make sure that that accessibility piece is addressed.

In my riding, I have one of the largest armed forces bases in Canada, and that's always an issue for those personnel because they're all over the place. This obviously addresses that concern and I look forward to this piece of legislation moving forward.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: When the minister was speaking, he talked about how sometimes Ontarians get ahead of the game. I would suggest Ontarians are right on the game and that it's the government that is behind the game.

The minister said that he substantially followed the recommendations that were put forward by the committee to look into election reform. I would point out that they avoided the recommendation that was made by the committee about third party advertising, which is the largest intrusion into provincial politics in the last 15 years, and it's the elephant in the room that the government failed to address.

They also failed to address a recommendation made about a boundary commission. I'll be speaking to the bill in a few minutes and I'll have more to say about that. A boundary commissioner is responsible for the realignment of ridings so that there's an equality to the number of votes and the number of constituents in each riding.

Ontario, of course, is the only province in Canada that does not have a boundary commission. When we followed the federal boundaries, coterminous riding boundaries with the feds, we didn't need one, but since the 11 seats in the north have been maintained by this government in gerrymandering activities to maintain their seats up there, then the boundary commission would be required in order to have equity and fairness in the system.

He talked about essentially following the recommendations. However, there was a recommendation which I thought was a very strong one, that if they wanted a higher turnout, they should move the elections to the

spring, when there are more daylight hours for people to vote in. I'll have more to say about this later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment. I recognize the member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Folks have had a chance to sort of reflect on this legislation. I often get asked questions about the legislation, so I just wanted to walk through a couple of the questions I've been asked from time to time and give you the answers to some of these questions.

One question that I do get a lot of is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): To the member for Willowdale, I apologize. We had time for one last question and comment. I recognized you in error, actually, so now we go to—wrong speech.

There's still time for one more question and comment. I'll turn to the member for Brant, and I apologize for the confusion.

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to enter into a small piece of the debate, which I'd like to continue to do, and that is about the people. I think everyone has acknowledged that. Unfortunately, I'm not quite sure if the NDP is suggesting that this is a nothing bill or whether it is acknowledging that it is an attempt to bring us into the 21st century, which the member from Willowdale is so rightfully pointing out.

There are some advantages to what the proposal in this legislation is offering us. The advantage is to make sure that the people who have been disenfranchised are now re-enfranchised. The disenfranchised are people who could not get to the polling booth because of a wheelchair and because of the situation that was there. They had a right to vote, and some of the people who were at the polling station made those adjustments quite well, but it was not easy enough in all cases and I think that's what we're talking about in this particular piece of legislation.

Those who are serving our country in faraway places: Let's make it easier for them to vote. For the people that have disabilities that make it difficult: translators for those who don't have talking ability, those who need some assistance.

I think those are the ideas that we're trying to present today in this piece of legislation, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act of 2009, Bill 231.

1620

As I have said in the past and I'll continue to say, this bill will find itself in committee and offer an opportunity for those who believe that it's not good enough to be able to step forward and offer their support and ideas. For those who are in the opposition who believe that, yes, this is the right direction we're going in but there are still some things that need to be looked at, we will be reviewing the debate. Staff will pore over the comments that are made from everybody, from all the sectors that are going to be commenting on this particular piece of legislation, and make it the best possible piece of legislation it can be to improve the capacity for the people of Ontario to exercise their franchise—to vote. That's what we're going to be encouraging: making it easier for

people to vote. It's that simple. When we put that along with the people who are getting the training for this new piece of legislation, if passed and when passed, I would suggest that we will be able to see a rise in voting statistics because we are making it easier for them to vote and we are encouraging them to vote. We will be using our education system, which we've been doing, to encourage people to participate in the democratic process.

I thank the minister for putting the bill forward and I thank his parliamentary assistant for eloquently outlining what the bill says.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Once again, the Chair apologizes for any inconvenience to this House that my mistake may have caused.

I'll return now to the member for Willowdale, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker, and you're forgiven.

Anyway, we've brought this election reform legislation forward, as I said in my remarks, because it is incumbent on governments of whatever political stripe of the day to keep an eye on the integrity and the effectiveness of the electoral process.

There is such a change in attitudes out there among members of society, there's such a change in the development of new technologies, there's such a change in the public's expectations of how they should be able to participate effectively in the electoral process that it is incumbent upon all governments, from time to time, to update those rules which ensure that the people of Ontario can effectively participate in the electoral process. That's why the select committee was established. That's why the select committee was peopled with members of all political stripes from this Legislature.

I can tell you, from sitting on that select committee with my colleagues from the NDP and my colleagues from the Conservatives, who are obviously supportive of this legislation, that there was a non-partisan recognition that when it came forward, the core of the bill was to recognize that the process had to be modernized so that the voters of Ontario, the voters who place us here, the voters who listen to our arguments during political campaigns and, based on those political arguments and political representations, make choices of who they want to vote for and who they want to return to be the governing party of Ontario—that process has to have integrity and effectiveness. This legislation serves that end, integrity and effectiveness.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm pleased to have some thoughts on this piece of legislation. It's an interesting bill in that it's not so much about what's in the bill. There's much in the bill that could be supported. However, the things that were left out of the bill were a shame. It was too bad to miss the opportunity. It was mentioned by the member from Brantford that this bill would bring the election process in Ontario into the 21st century. I think it would certainly advance the election

process; I'm not sure it makes the 21st century or not. It may get us into the 1990s. It's too bad that we missed this opportunity, because the committee made some excellent recommendations that were either ignored or passed over.

The minister mentioned again that, substantially, the recommendations of the committee were followed. That is true in that many of the clauses in the bill did come out of that committee. However, the exception to that is that third party advertising during elections, to the degree that it takes place in Ontario, was recommended for some action, and there has been action taken by the federal government, by the Quebec government and by the BC government. There's a bill currently working its way through the Legislature in Alberta. Other provinces have seen fit to do that, and that is one reason why I would say that this legislation does not bring us into the 21st century; it leaves us in the 1990s, and that's too bad.

The one recommendation that was made was that fixed election dates—in political parties, there's a debate as to whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. Possibly in weighing those, those in opposition would say that it's a good thing; those in government might not agree with it. However, fixed election dates have seen the turnout in Ontario elections—which has continually declined. From 62% or 63% in my first election in 1995, I believe in the last election in 2007, the turnout was something like 56% across the province. It was 58%, I think, in 2003. The committee made a number of recommendations as to how that might be corrected. One was to move the fixed date to the spring. Traditionally—I suppose not traditionally, but in many, many cases in Ontario, provincial elections were held in the spring. In the spring, there is more daylight. People spend more time out of doors and they're more likely to leave home again after they've come home from work. If the polls were open until 9 o'clock, I think that you would see more people participating in the election in the spring as opposed to the fall.

Also, there was a recommendation made that election day either be declared a holiday, so people would have time to vote, or that it be held on Saturdays or on some day on the weekend—it could be held on Sundays or Saturdays. There were some religious connotations to that. However, Saturdays are a time that could very well increase voter participation if it was indeed the desire of the government to increase the opportunity for people to vote.

The minister also spoke about the size of the ridings that they have in Ontario. He made comment that the 11 ridings in northern Ontario—he was very pleased that they were able to maintain those 11 ridings. I have difficulty with those 11 ridings, especially from the point of view of the size of my particular riding, the riding of Halton. The riding of Halton probably has 230,000 people in it currently, when the average Ontario riding has 107,000 in it. That's well more than double the size of the average riding. If you do the math on that, the people who are the electorate in Halton—and they have one vote in this House through me—my constituents are

getting half a vote per constituent as opposed to someone who is in an average riding of 107,000 people in Ontario.

When we go into northern Ontario, the gerrymandering of those ridings in maintaining the 11 seats up there left some ridings where there are fewer than 65,000 people in them. Those numbers give the electorate in those ridings a disproportionate value to their vote in comparison to the people who cast a ballot in the riding of Halton. That is unfair and that should be corrected by a committee such as this. That is another opportunity that was missed and another instance as to why this bill is not necessarily one of the 21st century; it is one perhaps of the late 20th century.

This legislation, as I started out to say, is a very acceptable piece of legislation for what it says; it is not necessarily a successful piece of legislation because of what it has left out. The things that concern me are not what's in the bill but what is not in the bill.

1630

There's nothing in this bill about third party advertising. That's something that has gone on in this province for the last two or three elections and which operates outside the Election Act, and that is very, very dangerous from the point of view of democracy. What makes elections very questionable in this province is obviously third party advertising, and it's very obvious, very blatant and very purposeful in what it does to elections and election results in this province. For the government to bring in a piece of legislation that ignores the largest change in the election process that we've had in this province over the last decade or so is very disappointing. Third party advertising distorts and flaunts the Election Act, something that has grave concerns for the democratic process in Ontario. That is the largest concern about this piece of legislation, in that nothing in this legislation is said about third party advertising.

One of the other things that is very concerning—and I think it was point 14 in the explanatory notes—is where the Chief Electoral Officer can authorize or commission reports and research, given the history of this government on their contracting for reports and research. There's no direction given in the act as to how these commissioned reports or this research should be conducted. I could go on by mentioning the Samsung contract just recently, which was a sole-sourced contract: about \$437 million that's going to a sole-sourced, untendered contract. It's unbelievable that that much of Ontario taxpayers' money can be spent over the next number of years without having a tendering process and perhaps even attracting a company in Ontario that can do some or all of what Samsung has been contracted to do.

We also saw the Windsor energy plant, which was in conjunction with the casino in Windsor, contracted for, I think, \$40 million or so, and the contract rose to \$81 million. It was an untendered contract, sole sourced, and, of course, the energy plant fails to turn on when you throw the switch. It's what happens when governments don't take the proper precautions in doing contracts with taxpayers' money.

That's one of the things that concerns me in that this Chief Electoral Officer is going to be authorized to commission reports and research, and yet it doesn't give any guidelines whatsoever about whether best practices should be used. It doesn't say what those best practices should be. It doesn't say anything about using the lowest bidder. It doesn't say anything about going to public tender. It doesn't say anything about cost controls. It doesn't say anything about any application of how these contracts for commissions and reports will be done.

Given the recent history, of which I've enumerated only a few—I could go on with a number of other ones, like Sarah Kramer being bought off with \$25,000 for a single speech; the eHealth board and \$1.5 million in severance payments; Glen Murray—15 million health care dollars spent to buy the Toronto Centre by-election. That was during the by-election when the Grace Hospital was bought out. Steve Mahoney received \$140,000 per year for a part-time job. You know, it just goes on and on about the waste that this government has entered into when it comes to spending taxpayers' dollars, and spending taxpayers' dollars to solve their political problems, and that's a shame.

Here we have a piece of legislation before the House that gives authority to the Chief Electoral Officer to commission reports, to commission studies and research, and it doesn't give any direction to him whatsoever as to how those reports should be commissioned or how those reports should be tendered.

A permanent boundary commission was also debated during the committee, but it is not included in this bill. Again, that's a shame, because the boundary commission is something that nine of the other provinces in Canada have and that Ottawa, our federal government, has. A boundary commission is something that determines how big a riding should be, what the boundaries of that riding should be, so that it equalizes the number of voters and the number of constituents in each of those ridings and makes sure that "one member, one vote" is equally distributed across Ontario. So if you're a member from Thunder Bay and in the last redistribution you represented 107,000 people, and if you're a member from downtown Toronto, essentially you would also represent 107,000 people at the time of the redistribution. The boundary commission would make those decisions.

In Ontario, a boundary commission would be commissioned or would be proposed in a piece of legislation such as this, and here we are with this piece of legislation—that has come through committee, has been studied—and still we don't have a boundary commission, and a boundary commissioner is not proposed in this piece of legislation. It's amazing to me that the government can be proud of this piece of legislation when they have omitted two of the most essential things that are needed in Ontario at this point in time.

When the Select Committee on Elections put out their report, there was a dissenting opinion put out by the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Norm Sterling. He was a member of that committee and was very upset

about the fact that those things were missing. It's a one-page report, and I'd like to read it into the record.

"The PC caucus endorses recommendation 26 of the committee to limit third party spending in Ontario, but wants to make certain that this recommendation is implemented. Third party advertising has been recognized as a serious problem in Canada by our federal Parliament and by five provinces: British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Alberta.

"Ontario has a law, but it is very weak in that it only requires registration and reporting of contributions for six months of the election year. As the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, Mr. Essensa told the committee, 'This allows third parties to build advertising war chests but not to report on the source of those contributions at an earlier time.'

"Some Canadian jurisdictions have enacted limits on third party spending. They range from a low of \$300 in the province of Quebec to a high of \$183,300 federally.

"In Ontario there is no limit. In the last provincial election, the third party advertiser 'Working Families' spent more than \$1 million on advertising during the writ period. They raised \$1.4 million solely from trade unions.

"Because of the way Ontario's election finance laws are written, it is impossible to know how much was raised and spent prior to the issuance of the election writ.

"Election laws have been enacted to ensure a level playing field between politicians and their respective parties; to ensure that elections are held in a free and fair manner and that they are open and transparent. As third party advertisers become more involved in electoral events, it is necessary to ensure that they are governed by those same laws and that the laws are designed in such a manner as to recognize that elections are contested by individuals who put their names forward as candidates for public office and, in most cases, the political parties to which they belong.

"Third party advertisers have a legitimate role to play in the democratic process but they need to be open and transparent and should not have a freer hand to influence the political process than the individuals and parties who take part in the election. Further, it is also important to ensure that such third parties are truly independent, and are not subject to undue influence from any registered candidate or political party in the conduct of the advertising campaigns.

"Therefore, the PC caucus recommends, in concert with recommendation 26, that the Legislative Assembly enact a law that:

"—restricts third party spending;

"—restricts third party contribution;

"—requires timely reporting of third party contributions, whenever donations are made"—i.e., not limited to the six months prior to the writ; and

"—provides for better enforcement of existing law to ensure that third party spending is not used to circumvent election finance laws, including stronger anti-collusion provisions.

"Further, we recommend that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario establish an all-party committee, with

equal representation from all three parties, to propose draft legislation to address these issues."

1640

That concludes the dissenting opinion in the report of the Select Committee on Elections, and it was purposefully done. It was a level, even-handed recommendation and it is one that I think the government should have taken much more seriously than it obviously did, because it has been totally ignored when it came to the drafting of the bill.

I might also comment as to who these Working Families are. I can tell you that they're a group of trade unions that include the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; the Canadian Auto Workers union; the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Local 128; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; the millwrights; the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793; the painters district council 46 and the Ontario Pipe Trades Council. They contributed, in total, \$1.4 million, with the largest contribution falling to, let me see, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation with \$170,000—oh, the English Catholic teachers' association outdid them with \$175,000. The Canadian Auto Workers were somewhat pikers in this deal; they gave \$200. Individual millwrights gave \$1,254.24. The International Union of Operating Engineers gave \$66,389 and the building and construction trades gave \$26,657—all to be spent on advertising.

It's interesting that there appeared—

Interjection: That's what we know of.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Those are the ones we know of. Those are the funds that were raised six months prior to the election date. There could have been a lot more money raised prior to that date and I would suggest that there probably was.

There's also a very close relationship between the boards of directors that run Working Families and the board of directors that runs the Ontario Liberal Party, with the relationship being so close that it would be difficult to pass the sniff test if you were suggesting that the two might be in collusion with each other. That is, they used the same advertising and communications group, Arrow Communications, which was paid almost \$200,000 by the Ontario Liberal Party. They were also used by Working Families. Pollara is a polling company used by the Ontario Liberal Party, and they were also used by Working Families in Ontario. The list goes on and on as to how those two organizations are so tightly held together.

We talked about what's not in the bill, about the Working Families Coalition scandal and the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, who recognized this problem in his recommendations. He recommended to the government that something should be done about this. There should be some restrictions placed on how much third party advertisers can raise, as there are in five other provinces and in the federal government as well, and nothing was done. That was something that the government, in drafting the bill, totally ignored.

As I pointed out earlier, the bill also should have created a boundaries commission to ensure that fair, transparent and democratic boundaries are created and people are equally represented. Usually during a boundaries commission, the commissioners are charged with putting together ridings that have like interests amongst them. That would mean that in the town of Milton, which has currently about 90,000 people in it—by election day in 2011, that will probably be pretty close to 107,000—the people of Milton would be like-minded. Currently the people of Milton are lumped in with the people of upper Oakville and upper Burlington, and I would suggest that there's a significant difference between those groups of people and the issues that they're interested in.

On the other hand, if I look north, I see the towns of Halton Hills, Georgetown and Acton. I look at those people in association with the town of Milton and I see that the interests of those three groups of people—Georgetown, Acton and Milton—are very similar. The same issues that bother one would bother the other, where that is not necessarily true for the people of Oakville and the people of Burlington, who are much more urbanized than those in the northern part of the region of Halton.

A boundaries commission is something that this committee overlooked, and I think it was a serious omission.

The Select Committee on Elections considered the government's proposals and complementary proposals made by the present and past Chief Electoral Officers. Despite the desire of the committee, this bill does not harmonize Ontario's electoral legislation with the federal legislation, which was a goal of this committee, and it doesn't do that. Neither does it address the issue of third party advertising, which I have already spoken about.

As a result of this bill, voting by proxy will be replaced by voting by special ballot. Ontario is one of the only provinces that permit proxy voting and do not permit mail-in or special ballots. That's one of the pieces of this legislation that I kind of like. I think that's a good thing.

I see also that they're going to make all kinds of other special provisions for people to vote, including home visits for voting, visits to hospital rooms and daycare centres and places of care for our elderly citizens and those types of places.

I'm not sure that all those other things are necessary if you have a mail-in ballot. Somebody can take a mail-in ballot, fill out a name and an address and perhaps a social insurance number or some form of identification, a PIN number, from the voting rules. This person can vote in that method. I think that would make access to the ballot box much better than it is today.

In today's world, people travel consistently and are away from home for lengthy periods of time. Quite often they'll take a contract in another country that may last three, four or five months or even longer than that. I quite often get requests through the constituency office because someone has been on a contract and out of the province for 10 months. Of course, when you're out more

than six months you need to have a three-month residency period to get back into our health care system. If someone is working overseas on an overseas contract, that isn't necessarily fair. You have to go through some hoops in order to get that looked after. However, that's the world we live in. Voting by mail-in ballot, providing that ballot can be adequately identified, is one of the good things that are in this bill.

This bill also provides the Chief Electoral Officer with the power to set the time and date of advance polls in designated areas. This power does not extend the length of advance polls, which remains unchanged. Ontario currently has more advance polling opportunities than any other jurisdiction in Canada, and I think that's also a good thing in conducting an election. Making polls available to people who want to cast their ballot, I think, is a good thing and a positive thing and one of the good things about this bill.

The bill also expands the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer in a number of other areas, and I'll get to those in a minute.

As a result of the Representation Act of 2005, Ontario's electoral districts are no longer tied to changes in federal electoral districts. That was the bill that was passed in 2005 that maintained the 11 seats in northern Ontario, even though those seats made it inequitable as far as the number of voters who cast ballots in those seats. As few as 65,000 voters are in some ridings in northern Ontario, whereas, I mentioned earlier, the population of my riding in Halton is 230,000, with perhaps 180,000 voters. That makes the voters in these small ridings have a disproportionate impact on bills that are voted on in this House.

1650

Mike Brown over there doesn't have the same number of voters that he votes for that I would vote for, and that's inequitable in Ontario. I think you would agree with me.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Obviously, your voice wasn't listened to during the period that this was discussed in your caucus.

The fact that we no longer follow the federal electoral districts, of course, is a huge problem, in that we don't have a boundaries commission. For that to be omitted from this piece of legislation, I find, is a significant problem.

The special ballots that would include home visits by returning officers in specific circumstances—that sounds rather expensive to me—replace the use of proxy voting. The powers of the Chief Electoral Officer, which I referred to earlier, are expanded, and they include modifying voting processes established by the act in consultation with registered parties; providing direction for the use of mobile polls at hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes and other institutions on polling day; providing the dates and times for advance polls in designated areas—advance polls are still required at the returning officer's office for the same number of days; directing that accessible voting equipment and related

vote-counting equipment be used during advance polls in every electoral district; establishing a fee payable to officers and other persons for their services under the act; and undertaking studies to improve the voting process and voting for persons with disabilities.

I pointed out earlier that the act, although it gives the power to the Chief Electoral Officer to undertake studies and conduct research into how to do those kinds of things, doesn't give any direction as to how those studies and research should be conducted, as to whether it's done in the most fiscally responsible manner or not. Again, given the history of this government, one would be suspicious about how that may work out in the future.

Another positive aspect of this bill is that students, particularly university or college students who are away from home, often could not cast their ballots because, election day being Thursday, they couldn't get home from class, or they were out of province at school, and so therefore they were disenfranchised, as it were. This bill will change that. It will allow students to vote in the electoral district where they are attending their post-secondary education facility. If that facility is in Ontario, they will be able to cast their ballot. If it is outside Ontario, I would suspect that they could use a mail-in ballot and, therefore, cast their ballot in that form. Again, they would be participating in the election process in Ontario, instead of being disenfranchised.

Also, there are a number of other parts of this act which I find are fairly good. They help the democratic process, I think. One of them is to expand how contributions over \$25 can be made to account for technological advancements in individuals and third parties. Quite often, keeping track of finances during an election process is a challenge. Money comes in to the party, and hopefully is accounted for, and that money then becomes part and parcel of the expenditures. I can tell you that the expenditures had better equal the income or the Chief Electoral Officer and his auditor are going to give you a very, very difficult time. The Election Act in Ontario is very good in that way, in that all money has to be accounted for. That's a very good thing. This strengthens that and allows for electronic contributions and the tracking of those contributions.

Also, there was a bit of a loophole in that an estate of a deceased person could make a contribution to a party and constituency association. The person and their estate are deemed to be one person, and contribution limits for individual persons apply. I don't think that would have amounted to a great deal of money, certainly not the \$1.4 million that the Working Families Coalition would account for, but it does introduce a factor of fairness into the election, and that's a good thing.

The Chief Electoral Officer will make an electronic database which records all contributions received and allows for the issuing of receipts for registered political parties, constituency associations and candidates. A party may opt into the use of the database, but upon doing so, must use it. The publication, broadcast or transmission of any election survey results not previously made available

in an electoral district on polling day before the close of all polling stations is prohibited. That was another loophole that from time to time was used during political elections. Sometimes the accuracy of those polls would be strongly questioned. Sometimes they were old polls. Sometimes they were not conducted in the same manner that a good polling company would have used.

Official websites to a registered party: A candidate or constituency association are exempt from the blackout period for campaign advertising. You have a lot of advertising that goes on to your website, and of course taking down your website the day before or the day of the election was a very difficult thing to do. Also, the use of the website to direct voters to their polling stations becomes an intricate part of the campaign and getting people out to vote, the culmination of really everything that you did throughout the campaign period. Making that exemption official—it was kind of there in the past, but it was kind of overlooked. You were told that it was okay, that you didn't have to adhere to it, but strictly speaking it was a problem. It's very nice to have that cleared up so that people know exactly where they stand during the election.

Campaign expense limits will be determined by using the greater number of electors shown in the list of electors after the writ is issued or the number of electors entitled to vote, as determined by the Chief Electoral Officer after the election. This was a clause that would greatly affect perhaps three ridings in Ontario: the King-Vaughan-Aurora riding, which is a very rapidly growing riding; also the riding of Markham, which is very fast-growing and has huge numbers of people; and, of course, my riding of Halton, which is the fastest-growing riding in Canada. Throughout the campaign, you're never sure how much money you can spend, because there are limits as to what you can spend during the writ, and the election rolls keep changing during the election. When you do mailings to individual houses, which are very expensive, you end up not knowing if you're going to go over the amount designated for the individual election expenses or whether you're going to be too far under. You don't want to be too far under, but you don't want to be over. You don't want to be over by a nickel, because there are dire consequences to that.

1700

Having this flexibility as to what the numbers are, all of those people who are not on the permanent list of electors and who get themselves on during an election—in the last election I think there were over 5,000 voters in my riding of Halton who got on to lists during the campaign and, of course, that made quite a difference to the amount of money that we could spend during the campaign writ period.

I would talk again about some of the consequences and some of the effects of Working Families, who raised \$1.4 million in the six months prior to the election. Perhaps they raised more than that before that point in time, and because of the way that Ontario's election finance laws are written, it's impossible to know how

much was raised and spent prior to the issuance of the election writ.

“Election laws”—and I think this bill is aimed in this direction—“have been enacted to ensure a level playing field between politicians and their respective parties, to ensure that elections are held in a free and fair manner and that they are open and transparent. As third party advertisers become more involved in electoral events, it is necessary to ensure that they are governed by those same laws”—the individuals who put their names forward, who put their names on the ballot as candidates for public office and, in most cases, the political parties to which they belong.

Third party advertisers have a legitimate role. I'd point out to you—and I make that point strongly—that “Third party advertisers have a legitimate role to play in the democratic process, but they need to be open and transparent and should not have a freer hand to influence the political process than the individuals and parties who take part in the election. Further, it is also important to ensure that such third parties are truly independent and are not subject to undue influence from any registered candidate or political party....”

I pointed out before there's a strong relationship between Working Families and the Liberal Party and that strong relationship, I suggest, would not pass the sniff test but, so far, the Chief Electoral Officer has not taken action in that direction.

The Chief Electoral Officer reported on May 7, 2009, to the Select Committee on Elections. He made a good report, some five or six pages long. He thanked the Chair. He pointed out that he would like to focus on three areas of his interest and suggested the committee should do something about these three areas. The first one he mentioned was third party advertising and the third party advertising requirements in the Election Finances Act, which he suggests are very weak; secondly, “questions the select committee may wish to consider with respect to the regulation of third party advertising; and third, the role of the Chief Electoral Officer in administering the election finances process.” He felt that his hands are tied in dealing with those third party participants, and he felt that was not necessarily a thing that enhanced the democratic process in Ontario.

He asked, “First, should Ontario adopt third party spending limits? Currently, Ontario has no spending limits. In comparison, there are third party election advertising limits in other jurisdictions. Federally, a third party is limited to spending \$183,300 in total and no more than \$3,666 in any one electoral district. In British Columbia, a third party is limited to spending \$150,000 in total and no more than \$3,000 in any one electoral district. In New Brunswick, a third party is limited to spending no more than 1.3% of the maximum amount a political party can spend if it runs a candidate in every electoral district. And in Quebec, a third party is limited to spending \$300 on issue advertising, and third parties may not advertise to directly promote a party or candidate.

“The second area of consideration is, should Ontario adopt third party contribution limits? Currently, no jurisdiction has contribution limits, but Alberta has just introduced a bill, Bill 205, that would limit a contributor to giving a third party for its advertising no more than \$30,000 in an election year and \$15,000 in a non-election year.” That would still mount up to a fairly significant war chest for a third party advertiser to take part in.

Should Ontario try to limit third party advertising? He suggests in a rather long paragraph that he thinks there should be some limits, as other provinces have done. Then he gives a dissertation on the constitutionality of third party advertising. It's important that if there are limits placed on third party advertising, it be done in a manner that is fair and equitable and does not limit how and what they say. That's a very important part in the democratic process. As I pointed out earlier, there is a place in the democratic process for third party advertising. It has to be fair, equitable and transparent.

He suggests again that it is not his place to answer these questions—it was the committee's responsibility to do so—but he does point out that these are very important questions that other jurisdictions have turned their minds to, and he recommends that Ontario do the same. Again, it's a shame that this piece of legislation has come before the House and has not taken any stance whatsoever on this very important change in the electoral process that's taking place in Ontario.

Riding boundaries and fixed election dates: Fixed election dates are something that really needed some attention to be paid to it. A fall election doesn't make a lot of sense in Ontario, in my mind. First of all, you run a risk of interfering with the municipal elections, which happen each October now. They used to happen in November, but they now happen in the last week in October, I believe—and that's a good thing. But running a provincial election in the fall is, again, of questionable value. I think that people are far more likely to turn out if the election is held in the spring. If the government wants people to turn out for elections, which they say they do, then I think changing the election date from fall to spring would have helped to accomplish that to some degree. It's disappointing that that opportunity was missed, because these bills don't come along every year or two. The last one came along in 2005. It's now 2010. Updating election acts maybe happens every five years. Maybe it will be 10 or 15 years before we see another one. Missing this opportunity is too bad. It's an opportunity missed, and that's always a shame.

There are also a number of other parts of this bill. I won't go into all of them. The 2005 bill was hotly contested and didn't go as far as it should have gone in being fair and equitable for the people of Ontario. That, again, was a missed opportunity and it's something that's probably not going to come back for some time, and that's too bad.

1710

Perhaps if this bill went to committee, we could look at amendments to it, which might indeed add some

weight to it—to put in a boundary commissioner, for instance, or put in a part of the bill that would talk about third party advertising—and make it truly an equitable bill that would help the democratic process in Ontario, that would make it equal, that would bring it right up to date so that it was as good a process in Ontario as it is in five other provinces and the federal government, which have those regulations in place as we speak. It's always a shame, politically, when you miss those opportunities.

If I could summarize: The Election Finances Act, which is affected by this bill, has some good pieces in it. Again, it misses that third party advertising, but the estates, the electoral officer and the electronic database that it talked about, the broadcasting or transmission of election survey results that cannot be made available, official websites, registered parties—those are all positive things.

Also, the Election Act, which is also impacted by this bill with the elimination of enumeration and the maintaining of a permanent voters list: I think those are positive things.

There was a point in the last election when some of the polling stations that we had in the riding of Halton were so new that collecting those names for the permanent polling list was not possible, and they did send out enumerating teams to those polls. I think eliminating enumeration works well for 90%, 95% of Ontario, but for those ridings that have extremely rapid growth, such as the riding of Halton, I think that perhaps enumeration still has a value. It's too bad it was eliminated and not just mothballed so that it could be used in very special circumstances. That's perhaps another opportunity that was missed.

Also, the elimination of proxy voting, I think, is a positive thing, and the use of mail-in ballots can be a positive change to the election process in Ontario.

I think that concludes my comments on this bill, Madam Speaker. I thank you for your help and for listening to my dissertation.

I would like to encourage the government to take this bill to committee, to look at the opportunities to make it an even stronger bill, a better bill, by adding particularly those two parts to the bill, one of which deals with the boundaries commission. I don't know why Ontario should be the only province in Canada without a boundaries commission, particularly when we're setting boundaries.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It's because you guys passed the law.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I see the member opposite wants to add a boundary commission and I would encourage him to do so. At least read the piece of legislation and maybe you'll find out that it's not in there.

The second piece that I'd like to see in the legislation is of course some control on third party advertising that would make it transparent. I'm not trying to do away with it; I'm trying to make it part of the process so that it's fair, transparent and equitable to everybody involved in the election process.

With that, Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Halton as he spoke for some 50 minutes and what he had to say. He said at the beginning, he said in the middle and he said at the end that his three primary concerns were the boundaries commission, third party advertising and election financing.

To deal with each of the points that he tried to make—and I do agree with the member from Algoma-Manitoulin: The reason that we don't have a boundaries commissioner is that the Harris government did away with the boundaries commissioner under the Fewer Politicians Act. Ontario became the only province and the only jurisdiction in Canada that doesn't set its own boundaries. We even give the city of Toronto the authority to set up its own boundaries, but we don't do it ourselves.

I don't entirely blame the Harris government because this government has been here now for six plus years and could have done something and should have done something to make the law better. We cannot pretend in Ontario that we have fair boundaries when we have such disparities. We should not have adopted the federal in the first place because of the plus and minus 25% rule they have, trying to accommodate a land that is as broad as Canada with jurisdictions like Inuvik in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon with huge, vast swaths of land. They have to do it. We don't have to have a plus or minus 25% rule in Ontario, yet we follow them.

He also talked about the third party advertising. I am in agreement with what he had to say, but his whole talk around election financing did not hit the issue, and that is that the election financing laws in Ontario are very unjust and have not been dealt with in this bill. I intend to speak to that when it comes to my turn.

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

Mr. Ted McMeekin: This is Kindness Week, at least until sundown, so I want to be gentle as I respond.

I want to say at the outset there is a rather well-known American political commentator who once observed that those who hold their elected officials in contempt will not long respect themselves. I think that's true and I think this act is about setting out, not in any complete way but certainly in a rather pronounced way, to focus on the issues of trust and integrity with respect to municipal elections. Quite frankly, while I found much of what the member from Halton said to be intriguing, and some of it I even agreed with, I think it's important that we do move forward inasmuch as we have set out through a select committee of the Legislature, which came to a broad-based agreement on most of the principles in this way. I'm certainly proud that our government has moved forward.

I found it interesting. The conversation around the Working Families Coalition being in apparent collusion with one political party seemed a little difficult to gulp.

Third parties support any party. There weren't too many that supported your party in the last election, I noticed, but that would be to go down another road.

I think the whole issue of modernizing the election process with mail-in ballots, special ballots, particularly post-secondary students having an opportunity to get engaged at the universities they're at, is very progressive. I note that the member noted some of those things.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Certainly the Working Families Coalition is a front for the Liberals. You'd have to be from Mars to have missed their message. In 2003 the message was, "Not this time, Ernie," in a million dollars' worth of TV, radio and print ads—or a little more than a million the last time in 2007. In 2007, I recall in their TV ads they had about four different versions, and they were actors, saying, "Oh, I'm a school teacher and I remember how horrible it was during the Mike Harris era."

Who benefits from that solely? It's the Liberal Party of Ontario and it's the usual culprits who have never supported my party anyway, that I can recall in my 20 years, because they like to run the school system, they like to run the trades system; they like ratios the way they are in our trades. They include the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; the Canadian Auto Workers, who obviously don't speak for their members because we win in Oshawa; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Local 128; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; millwrights; International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793; painters district council 46; Ontario Pipe Trades Council—and those are the ones they know of. They raised \$1.4 million prior to the last election during the writ period because we have no control or caps on spending by third party coalitions like this. They spent a million dollars, all in your favour. That's a million dollars that you didn't have to account for under the campaign spending limits.

1720

So it is a front for the Liberal Party of Ontario. For some reason, we can't get the commission to deal with it. We can't get the Chief Electoral Officer to deal with it. He's got no spine in this area. Almost every other province limits third party advertising to make it fair, and that's all we're asking for in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Bob Delaney: These proposals are based on the recommendations of the Select Committee on Elections, which, of course, included members of all three parties. What they intend to do to make a difference for those who live in communities like mine in Mississauga and communities like Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville is to enable more people to be able to exercise that franchise.

These are proposals that I think really do need some exposure in committee, but there are some in there that I think are really worth a serious look. For example, for

many of those who choose to spend the winters in Florida, the proposals here allow you to exercise your ballot franchise should you be vacationing in Florida or anywhere else at the time an election is called. I think that's a good way to enable people, to empower people to be able to exercise their vote.

At present, about the only way for people to exercise that vote is by proxy. The difficulty in that is that it doesn't maintain ballot secrecy or confidentiality. Really, by giving someone the ability to vote by proxy, they may or may not vote the way you've asked. All you've done is given them the ability to vote on your behalf. So Ontario is alone among the federal government and other provinces in that at the moment it does not permit this type of special ballot for any part of the electorate.

The other part about it that I really like is with regard to municipal elections, moving them from November into October so that candidates don't have to worry about vandalism of signs and whatnot that happens so often around Halloween. With a municipal election coming up this year in October, I think we're going to see the benefits of that type of good-sense move.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Halton has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The member, Michael Prue, for Beaches–East York—Beaches–East York?

Mr. Michael Prue: Beaches–East York.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member for downtown Toronto there someplace: Yes, he's quite right. We did cancel a boundaries commission. But in context, we cancelled the boundaries commission because we made all of our ridings coterminous with the federal ridings in Ontario. To eliminate confusion from people as to which riding they lived in, we made those ridings the same.

Then the provincial Liberal government came along in 2005 and gerrymandered the north so that the northern limits no longer matched the federal ridings. They wanted to maintain 11 seats in the north, of which they took a disproportionate part. So it was a gerrymandering of those seats, and once that happened, it required a boundaries commissioner to be put back in place, because otherwise it's just acts of this House or orders in council that change those boundaries, and that's eminently unfair to the people of Ontario. It's eminently unfair. It's unfair on the surface. Anybody understands that it's unfair; anybody who looks at it knows it's unfair.

It's the same with third party advertising. When it's not controlled, when it operates outside the election process, when it's not transparent, it's eminently unfair.

Those two things should have been addressed in this piece of legislation, and they weren't. That's a sad day for Ontario. There is much good in this bill, but there are two things in this bill that are sadly lacking, and that is a great shame. We missed this opportunity. Another opportunity won't come along for a long time. I would suggest that perhaps both of those issues were missed because of political opportunism, and that's a sad day in Ontario.

VISITORS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I beg the indulgence of the House at this time to introduce two individuals in the east members' gallery: Liam Gadbois and Kylie Filion, both former students of the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

ROYAL ASSENT
SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to certain bills in his office on December 15, 2009.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 168, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act with respect to violence and harassment in the workplace and other matters / Projet de loi 168, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail en ce qui concerne la violence et le harcèlement au travail et d'autres questions.

Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne le rendement des élèves, la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et d'autres questions.

Bill 179, An Act to amend various Acts related to regulated health professions and certain other Acts / Projet de loi 179, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les professions de la santé réglementées et d'autres lois.

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act with respect to greenhouse gas emissions trading and other economic and financial instruments and market-based approaches / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne l'échange de droits d'émission de gaz à effet de serre ainsi que d'autres instruments économiques et financiers et approches axées sur le marché.

Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 187, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes techniques et la sécurité et la Loi de 1996 sur l'application de certaines lois traitant de sécurité et de services aux consommateurs.

Bill 196, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of Barrie and the Town of Innisfil / Projet de loi 196, Loi concernant la

modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de Barrie et la ville d'Innisfil.

Bill 203, An Act to allow for better cross-border policing co-operation with other Canadian provinces and territories and to make consequential amendments to the Police Services Act / Projet de loi 203, Loi visant à permettre une meilleure coopération avec les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada en ce qui concerne les services policiers transfrontaliers et à apporter des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services policiers.

Bill 204, An Act to protect animal health and to amend and repeal other Acts / Projet de loi 204, Loi protégeant la santé animale et modifiant et abrogeant d'autres lois.

Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

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.

Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

Bill Pr15, An Act to revive Allaura Investments Limited.

Bill Pr18, An Act to revive 1516495 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr25, An Act to revive Cen-Tower Investments Limited.

Bill Pr27, An Act to revive Brismair Property Management Inc.

Bill Pr28, An Act to revive 1105481 Ontario Inc.

ELECTION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I am here to debate Bill 231. At the outset, as I am wont to do, I always talk about what's good in bill and then I go on to say what could have been better, but there are some things in this bill which I think deserve some special mention.

The first is the special ballots. It is a good provision. The government, in its wisdom, brought forward this special ballot provision which will allow people to vote in a much more easy way.

The second one is the provision for students to vote either in their home riding or in the riding in which they are attending school in the province. That, too, is a good provision. It takes me back to my student days. I remember back in 1971 being a student at Carleton University and having just arrived there. There was a September election in 1971 and there wasn't time to get on the voters list in Ottawa. I had to hop on the train after I had been there only about a week, come all the way to Toronto, vote, get on the train and come all the way back. Some of my colleagues thought I was crazy, but I insisted. That was going to be my first election. You had to be 21. That was going to be my first election, and I was not going to miss it. So whatever that cost me on the train, all the way to Toronto and all the way back, I did that.

1730

It would have been good, had someone in those days thought about this provision allowing students to vote in either place, or having a provision that I could have voted by mail or something else. But there was no time to do it between the time that I arrived in Ottawa and the time that I had to come back. There was literally only a week. I wasn't a resident there for long enough in the period to be able to cast a ballot.

So I think it's a good provision. I wanted to stay and give you that little history about why I think it's a good thing for other students in a similar situation to the one I found myself in, nearly 40 years ago now.

The third item is the depoliticizing of poll workers. We all know that one of the things is that the government, or the government party, gets to appoint poll workers in every single riding across the province. That would be hundreds of people who would get work for one or two or three days and then would be in some ways beholden to the government or thankful to the government or party members of the government or whatever, for whatever reason they got appointed.

The opposition parties would luck out if they had won that particular poll or if they had run second to a government member, and they would get an opportunity to appoint some people as well. If you had the misfortune of being, say, a Conservative in Beaches–East York who runs third, then you wouldn't be able to have that largesse passed on to the people who supported you.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, that was the case in the past. I'm not saying that will be the case forever. I'm being brutally honest. This is what sort of happens. Although I won the poll, won the riding, the Liberals would appoint them and the NDP would be given a few people. But this is going to be depoliticized.

I think this is an important event and it's not just to have people from your party sent over and put on the list to get some work for a day or two days. It is important that the public sees this as a non-political and almost a civil servant job.

I am thankful that this has been included in here, and it needs to have happened. It has taken so many years for

this very minor, I would think, amendment to take place so that people will be picked by the Chief Electoral Officer or the Chief Electoral Officer's assistants, and they will be picked on the basis of merit, of their being able to handle the job properly and to do it right. That's really all that the voters are looking for. So I am thankful that that is included in here.

When I spoke earlier, I also said that this bill is a fairly minor bill because it doesn't attempt to accomplish much. Yes, those three things are important, but there are so many things wrong with the electoral process in Ontario, which could have been mitigated, could have been dealt with by legislation, that have been left out.

I listened to my colleague from Halton. We don't see eye to eye on a lot of things, but he talked about the things that he thought were left out that were important, and they were important. Why is it that Ontario continues to not have legislation on third party advertising? He's absolutely right. This was talked about in the committee, but nothing is in the government bill. Why was there nothing on the changes to electoral financing? This could have been in the bill as well.

Before we recessed back in November, I remember standing in the House and asking the then Minister of Municipal Affairs why he wasn't taking appropriate actions, or what I thought were appropriate actions, in what is euphemistically called the city above the law, also known as the city above Toronto, also known as Vaughan, with all the things that were happening there. He responded in the House and he went outside later and responded, "How are we going to change the election finances for municipalities if we're not going to change it for ourselves?"

He acknowledged that the election finances for municipalities are not what they're supposed to be. It has caused innumerable problems across Ontario, and I think, unfortunately, Vaughan is the poster child of all of those problems. Just this week, I saw in the paper two more things that have happened to that poor unfortunate city, that poor unfortunate council. The mayor has been again cited in the courts, her appeals have been overturned, and she's facing all of those charges, notwithstanding.

There was also the unfortunate incident of a developer taking some of the key planning and bylaw enforcement officials from the city of Vaughan to a very lavish lunch. Unfortunately for the developer and for the officials, a person in the community got a copy of the bill for the lunch. Notice the bottles of *riposso*—nice vintage, by the way—notice the liqueurs, the dinners and the \$1,000 bill that came *feting* these civil servants. The city of Vaughan has had to take the appropriate action.

The reason I'm bringing all this up is not so much to talk again about the city of Vaughan, but about the then minister saying that he could not change or would not change the laws for municipalities because the province had not seen fit to make the changes for itself. That's what I want to talk about in part today, why this should have been included within the four walls of this particular legislation.

The bill could have adopted reforms. It could have adopted the reforms that have taken place in most of the other provinces of Canada, certainly our neighbours to the east and west, Quebec and Manitoba. It could have adopted the reforms that have taken place by the government of Canada, it could have adopted some of the reforms that have taken place in Saskatchewan, but this government chose not to make reforms.

This would have been the most meaningful, most important, most cogent thing that the government could have done. Today in the province of Ontario, in provincial elections, corporations donate more than 40% of all of the monies raised and spent during elections. Now, you have to question yourself: Is this a good thing? Certainly the government of Canada no longer allows it. In the province of Quebec, they no longer allow it. In the province of Manitoba, they no longer allow it. But here in Ontario, we don't talk about it. It doesn't come into the bill because that's not important enough, I guess, to be talked about.

We know in the last election that both the Conservatives and the Liberals got more than 50% of their money from corporate donations related to the election; we know that. It's a matter of public record. That's where the money comes from. For people who look at democracy—people from Democracy Watch, they're worried about that, I'm worried about that, but obviously the government is not.

We know in terms of the NDP, and I'll be very blunt, we get money from unions, probably a disproportionate share—not all of it, but that amounts to some 5% of everything that is raised, about 10 times less than the money that is raised corporately. We don't get it all. Contrary to popular view, the Liberals gets a fair share, a fair hunk of it. The Conservatives I don't think get very much at all, but that's the reality. That's just really what is happening around this.

We know that corporate donors are quite explicit about why they give the money that they do. They want to shape government policy, and access to politicians to press their views. One of my favourite quotes comes from a Liberal donor by the name of Silvio DeGasperi. He was asked why he attended a \$10,000-a-plate Liberal fundraiser put on by his colleague and friend Mr. Sorbara. He said bluntly, and I quote him, "I wanted to speak to Dalton about my development issue in Pickering. I knew the reason I was there." We know that.

Is there anything in this legislation dealing with that? Does anybody over there not think that this is somehow wrong? Does anybody think that the legislation shouldn't try to mirror what is happening federally and provincially in Quebec and Manitoba? Because it's not here in the bill.

We also know that political parties have grown overtly dependent on corporate donations and, in chasing big corporate donations, have ignored average citizens, a fact that has been noted by even corporate titans like former Royal Bank CEO Robert Taylor. I quote corporate titans: "Financially effective as it may be, the current system of

corporate fundraising doesn't help with (the) broader purpose (of) continuing the democratization of our politics"—CEO Robert Taylor, the Royal Bank.

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Corporate donations allow CEOs and majority shareholders to donate money two ways, through both corporate and individual donations, while average citizens can only donate as individuals. This makes donation limits unenforceable and, ultimately, farcical.

When I have questioned this in estimates, when I have questioned this in the House over many years, I never get a response. I never get anyone wanting to look at it to change it. The committee led by the member from Vaughan, Mr. Sorbara, looked at this. It was an all-party committee. Although it was an all-party committee, there were two dissenting reports. You've heard about the Conservative dissenting report. The NDP dissented primarily on this issue because we believe, in the province of Ontario, the time has come to give democracy back to the citizens, to make the citizens the people who actually count during an election—not who can raise the most corporate funds, not who can raise the most union funds, but citizens donating and participating in the electoral process. That is the only way we are going to increase participation, when citizens believe that they are part and parcel of the democratic process and that it is not being manipulated by other interests.

My colleague from Halton talked about third party interests and the expenditure of \$1.2 million on third party advertising. That's true, and it's unfortunate. But nothing is being done about that, and nothing is being done about the even wider, broader and more horrible issue, that big money is controlling the elections and what people are able to see. It controls the airwaves. It controls the amount of money that can be spent on television and radio and newsprint advertising. It controls who can and who cannot run for election with reasonable expectation of being elected.

We know that public financing would go a long way. If you look at what the other provinces do and the federal government does, that should be the template, the model for what we should be doing here in the province of Ontario.

The federal government gives 50% reimbursement to any party that gets 2% nationally or 5% in each district. So if you run a party and you get 5% in, say, eight or 10 ridings, then those eight or 10 ridings would be eligible for a rebate. If you run, as the Green Party did, and get more than 2%, as they did in the last election, you would be eligible for a 50% rebate, on the reimbursement of the amount that you spent nationally. This goes a long way because, at the same time, the federal government saw the necessity—and no one is allowed to make contributions on a corporate or union level anymore, only contributions from individuals, and those contributions have to be small. They're limited to \$1,000. If you contrast that to Ontario, where each person—I looked at this in awe, in shock and disbelief, and I wonder how many average citizens can afford to do this.

In Ontario, contributions from unions and corporations are allowed, and the limit from a person, a corporation, or a trade union is:

(1) to each party, \$7,500 per year times the indexation factor;

(2) to each constituency association, \$1,000 per year times the indexation factor;

(3) to constituency associations of any one party, \$5,000 per year times the indexation factor;

(4) to each candidate, \$1,000 per campaign times the indexation factor;

(5) to candidates endorsed by one party, \$5,000 total per campaign times the indexation factor.

And you think for a moment that corporations aren't buying this place? You think for a moment that big money doesn't do a lot of talking around elections? The people here who craft this legislation and stand up proudly talk about the students—a good thing; they talk about the disabled—a good thing they're thinking about that; they talk about other factors, but never once mention how much money is being raised by corporate donations, and the influence. Where is an ordinary citizen going to be able to come up with the \$30,000 or \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year to match what big corporations are giving to governments, usually governments in power?

Interjection: Can't do it.

Mr. Michael Prue: It can't be done.

In Quebec—the Quebec model is similar to the national one—they give back 50% if you get 1% of the vote, up to a maximum of 60% per elector. Manitoba has a law where you get 50% of the money back if you get 10% of the vote across all of Manitoba in an election. Saskatchewan has a similar law: 50% back if you get 15% across the whole of the province.

When they won't allow for corporate and union donations, it gives an opportunity for ordinary people to participate and for parties to get back the remaining monies, should they be successful in getting 2%, 1%, 10% or 15% of the vote in their respective jurisdictions. That's what needed to be in this bill. That's what was not contained within the body of the bill.

The member from Brant spoke and asked me why I thought it was such a minor bill. I think it's minor because it doesn't hit the key issue. The key issue is money and how the elections are being held. If you want people to be involved in the process and feel they're part of the process, they have to feel that they are contributing to it, not that it's being bought by someone else, not that it's being funded by someone else, not that their \$50 or whatever they want to donate to the process is not going to be enough. Ordinary people have to think, "This \$50 is absolutely essential to the process and to my candidate, and I want to donate it," not thinking the \$50,000 that corporation X is going to give is going to do the whole thing. That's not what democracy is about. In my view, and I think in many people's view, the fundamental failure and the declining level of people voting, most of it, comes from this.

I think we need to look too at what's not here in the bill, and that's real-time disclosure of where the money comes from. It's ingenious, what's done now. If you give more than \$100, it's supposed to show up on a website, and it usually does, within 10 or 15 days, in accordance with the act, although the act says 10. Sometimes it does take a little longer; I understand that. Monies that are donated end up on the website. But people are very smart, because they've started giving money to riding associations. Then the riding association funnels it back to the party, and that way it doesn't have to show up on the website. People are asking why that can't be controlled. This all-party committee sat around and they heard this idea. I think it might have even been one of the recommendations, but it didn't make it into the bill.

I heard the minister talk about citizens' juries and, you know, the great idea. Yes, it was a great idea. The citizens' jury sat there and did, I think, a bang-up job talking about proportional representation and a new system. But they were hamstrung from the beginning.

I remember standing in this Legislature when the then minister stood up and talked about the citizens' jury and how this was all going to unfold, and put an impossible condition on it, a condition that it was going to have to get the support of 60% of the electorate, and then a double condition, that it was going to have to take 50% in at least 64 of the ridings. This is untoward. This doesn't happen anywhere else in the world. The only other place it ever happened was in British Columbia, and in two attempts to change the electoral boundaries and the electoral map and the way that people are elected to the House in British Columbia, it failed both times on that ground, the first time narrowly, the second time more substantially. But they set conditions that are too high. What is the matter with a referendum where the winner gets 50% plus one on a clean and clear question? There's nothing in the bill about this. There's no sense empowering citizens' committees to go out and do the kind of work that that one did and then putting an impossible condition.

I know that the woman who was representing my particular riding came and said there was quite a discussion that the citizen representatives had around this issue. They felt disheartened from the beginning and that what they were doing was probably all for naught because of the impossibility and the setting of the standard so high that citizens would not be able to meet it; that there is always a reluctance to change, and that change, when it comes, is usually imposed by the narrowest of margins; and to set the value at 60% plus 50% in at least 64 of the ridings made many people very unhappy about doing this.

1750

I have to tell you that I did vote against the legislation. I voted against what this House imposed. It imposed it with closure. That's how democratic it was: It was imposed with closure against the opposition, because the opposition saw, quite rightly, that it was impossible.

Just so that the members opposite might know, everybody thinks that it was an unfair law in spite of the good

work done by the jury. The double standard in terms of setting such a high bar was put nicely by Fair Vote, which said:

“No government raises the bar for its own legislation, which often has far-reaching effects on the lives of Canadians. No politician has ever refused to accept a seat in Parliament or a provincial Legislature due to the failure to win 60% of the votes—many gladly take their seats despite winning less than 50% or even less than 40% of the votes in their ridings. In fact, thanks to the current voting system, most ‘majority’ governments in Canada gain power without winning a majority of votes.”

So, if we ever set up a citizens’ jury again with this legislation that you have seen fit not to change, I would hope that a government of the day has the moral and legal authority to come to a different conclusion in spite of the law not being changed and the 60% remaining on the books.

Next, I’d like to talk about enumerations, because not much has been done around the issue of enumerations, and in fact they appear to be redundant. I would suggest that enumerations are absolutely essential in a great many places in Ontario. If you live in an apartment building, particularly in urban Ontario—Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa—then you’re going to find that people change apartments very often. The list of people who are supposedly living in that apartment unit that is obtained through city hall is woefully inadequate. In fact, people change apartment units a little over once a year on average in many of the buildings in Toronto. About once a year there’s a wholesale change. There are changes and changes, and the person you thought was living there at the last election four years before has been replaced not once, not twice, but sometimes three and four times.

The enumeration process was a good process and ought to be followed in places like apartments. I do acknowledge that if you live in a house, if you own the house in which you live, city hall has a pretty good record, but if you live in an apartment building, if you live in any kind of housing that might be considered transient, if you’re a student, I can guarantee you, you’re likely left off the list.

I had the opportunity on election night in the riding of Toronto Centre to be in one of the downtown polls and to watch. The turnout was abysmal. It was less than 20% in the particular poll that I was watching. But the number of people who were forced to come in and swear, do all the documentation and run out and try to find a bill or something to confirm that they were living in a particular unit was very large, and so many of them had been left off the list. Thanks to most of those who showed up—they were eager, they wanted to vote. They went back out to get the necessary papers and came back. Had they not done so, the turnout would have been even lower.

I think it behooves this province to do enumerations in special circumstances. We need to know how many people are living there, especially if we’re trying to determine how much money can be spent by the candidates and in order to make sure that they are fair.

I want to talk a little bit about committees, too, because one of things that was discussed in the Sorbara select committee was how to make committees within this House fairer.

One of the things that they discussed and one of the things that is not contained in the bill is what to do with private members’ legislation.

I know that in the House of Commons in Ottawa that has just prorogued, with much consternation to the general public and editorialists across the country, they protect private members’ bills. They don’t protect government bills in the case of prorogation because prorogation is up to the government in power and generally to the Prime Minister, so that if the Prime Minister chooses to prorogue, he cannot expect his bills to survive the prorogation. But the legislation in Ottawa allows that the private members’ bills go through and that they remain on the order paper to be dealt with in the subsequent session of the Parliament. There’s nothing that’s been done here. I don’t know why in this place you have to stand up after every prorogation and reintroduce your bill.

I know I have had a bill that’s been debated three times. Twice it’s gone through committee and been successful. I know if this House is prorogued in a couple of weeks, it’s going to be lost and I’m going to have to stand up and introduce it for the fourth time. I don’t understand why nothing was done by this committee to include this. It seems to me that if the government of the day decides to prorogue, then those bills should be protected—and not just their own government bills, which they are wont to do.

Lastly—I have a long dissertation; I don’t know if this is an appropriate time—I want to talk about the lack of action around people with disabilities. Although the minister did talk about what was done for people with disabilities to make it easier for them to vote, I don’t believe it was enough. As the NDP disabilities critic, I do want to spend some time. So if this is an appropriate time, I would sit down and hold that piece altogether for the next opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), on December 7, 2009, the member for Halton gave notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care covering the expansion of Milton hospital.

Pursuant to standing order 38(b), the member for Halton has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and

the minister or parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

The member for Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It was just before Christmas, just before we adjourned, that I asked the Minister of Health about the expansion of the Milton hospital. The hospital was built at a time when the Milton community was 30,000 people. Today, the Milton community is 90,000 people. They have had an expansion program in place for some time, and I have asked the Minister of Health from time to time in this House when that expansion is going to move forward and take place.

The minister, in her response to me, said, "I just am a bit puzzled, because when we came to office in 2003, there was a tremendous pent-up demand for" hospitals. That is the part of her answer that was so unfair, because in 2001—and I'll give the minister a little history lesson here—the expansion of the Milton and Oakville hospitals began to take place. The business plan for those two hospitals was initiated. About 10 months later, those business plans were completed and they were both accepted by the Minister of Health. Those two hospitals were moving forward, Milton and Oakville, in concert.

In 2002, the sizing process—that's the next study that takes place in the creation of a new hospital—began to occur. That is when the size of the hospital is determined. All that was taking place in early 2003. The land for the Oakville hospital was designated. It wasn't completely transferred, but it was designated. The Oakville hospital and the Milton hospital were moving forward.

In 2003, the Liberals took power and they immediately shut down that process, so that the growth of those two hospitals, in two of the fastest-growing communities in Ontario, was stopped. The Oakville hospital didn't recommence the process until 2005.

1800

The Milton hospital didn't recommence the process—Milton, the fastest-growing town in Canada—until 2007, and then they didn't start where they stopped in 2003. They had to start again, with a business case. The delay has moved that hospital back so that it will be 2014 before it's going to be completed, if they move forward with it today.

The problem they had is that if we had continued the 2001 time schedule, when we initiated the growth of the Oakville and Milton hospitals, both those hospitals, the redeveloped Milton hospital and the brand new Oakville hospital, would have opened in 2009. They would have been operating today. Today, both those hospitals are hopelessly under capacity. There are more babies from Milton born outside Milton than are born inside Milton, because the hospital is so underfunded and small in size.

The planning process is just totally inadequate. The minister obviously just doesn't understand this, given her answer that it's too bad it wasn't done when we were in power. Well, we were doing it when we were in power, and it would have been open today if the Liberals had followed the time schedule that we had.

It's unfortunate that they didn't. It's unfortunate for the people of Halton. It's unfortunate for the people of Oakville, because that hospital in Oakville has been delayed three years. It was delayed two years initially, and then the Liberals took a year off on the Oakville hospital because they had no construction capacity. They had no construction capacity for the Oakville hospital; they were sending trade missions to the Middle East with construction companies on those trade missions, and yet they said there was no construction capacity in Ontario. Boy.

The people of Halton don't believe that, and the people of Halton are going to see to it in the next election that the Liberals reap the benefits of the decisions that they failed to make in an appropriate manner for the health care of the people of Halton in the past six and a half years.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Response?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just would like to state that when our government came into office, everyone knows that there was a massive health infrastructure deficit across the province of Ontario after many years of neglect and spending cuts by the previous government.

Our government introduced ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan which has seen over 100 major hospital projects get under way. This includes the Oakville-Trafalgar hospital, the largest redevelopment project in Ontario's history.

The new Oakville hospital will be a state-of-the-art facility. It will include a full range of health services, such as complex continuing care, rehabilitation and acute care. The primary acute in-patient site for Oakville will also offer secondary- and tertiary-level programs with a special focus on rehabilitation and geriatrics. This massive redevelopment will serve the Halton community.

We know there is more to do. That's why we are committed to a 10-year, \$60-billion infrastructure plan to continue the investments we've been making.

We look forward to working with the LHIN and the hospital on the proposal of the Milton site redevelopment.

In addition to the progress we've made on infrastructure, we've also made substantial investments in hospital funding. We've increased funding for hospitals by 42% since this government took office. We've increased funding to Halton Healthcare Services by \$75 million in base funding. That's a 70% increase since we took office. Halton has also benefited from funding for our aging at home strategy, receiving \$94 million over four years. We'll continue to invest in health care in Halton to ensure residents can get access to the care they need as quickly as possible.

I do commend the member for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents, but I would have to suggest he consider his party's own record when it comes to health care. His party cut \$557 million from hospital funding in their first two years in office. Halton Healthcare Services was cut by nearly \$2 million. This is quite the contrast against the \$75 million this government has invested in

Halton Healthcare Services. In fact, Halton was affected in many ways by the Conservative Party's approach to health care. For example, the number of doctors per person declined by 15% in Oakville and 18% in Burlington during their time in office. Their inaction on medical school spaces and internationally trained physicians affected Halton negatively.

Health care is a priority of our government, and we will continue to invest and get results for Ontarians.

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 tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1806.

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Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
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Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough–Centre	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

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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
Hampton, Howard (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	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, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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Mauro, Bill (LIB) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
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)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	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, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	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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Murray, Glen R (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
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Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
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Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Vacant	Leeds–Grenville	
Vacant	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	

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Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
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la politique sociale**

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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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