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Wednesday 15 September 2010

Mercredi 15 septembre 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 15 September 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 15 septembre 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY TAX CREDIT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR LES ACTIVITÉS DES ENFANTS

Ms. Smith, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 99, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the children's activity tax credit / *Projet de loi 99, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour les activités des enfants.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Applause.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you to my colleagues. I'm very excited this morning to be here in the House for second reading of the Children's Activity Tax Credit Act, 2010. This proposed act contains amendments to the Taxation Act, 2007, to implement a new, permanent and refundable tax credit for Ontario families.

The McGuinty government remains committed to enhancing existing services and introducing new and innovative initiatives to create measurable improvements in people's lives right here in Ontario. Of particular focus for our government has been improving opportunities for Ontario's children and Ontario's youth. I'm pleased to stand here to highlight a few of our accomplishments over the past seven years.

In 2009-10, we significantly reduced class sizes; I say that with ultimate pride as an educator and as a parent. All primary classes in Ontario have 23 or fewer students, and 90.5% of these classes have 20 or fewer students.

In 2009-10, 68% of grade 3 and grade 6 students met or exceeded the provincial standards in reading, writing and math. This is a 14% increase since 2002-03.

In 2008-09, 79% of students in Ontario graduated with a high school diploma. This means that more than 52,500 additional students have graduated from high school since 2003-04.

But we also know that learning takes place outside the classroom. A 2008 study conducted by Statistics Canada concluded: "Children's participation in organized extra-curricular activities has been associated with positive short- and long-term outcomes, such as academic achievement and pro-social behaviours, and with reduced negative outcomes, such as dropping out of school and emotional and behavioural disorders."

This is why the McGuinty government is proposing a new, permanent and refundable tax credit that would help ensure a healthy and active lifestyle for our young people. It makes it a little easier for parents to get their children involved in sports, arts and other activities. We know that that is absolutely crucial and so important to their development.

Under our proposed tax credit, parents would be able to claim up to \$500 of eligible expenses per child. They would receive a refundable tax credit worth up to \$50 per child and \$100 per child with a disability.

The 2008 Statistics Canada study also concluded that children from lower income homes were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. Unlike the federal government's children's fitness tax credit and similar other tax credits in provinces, our tax credit would be fully refundable. This means that low-income parents who pay little or no income tax will also benefit. Also unique to our tax credit, the maximum amount of tax credit would be indexed for 2011 and subsequent years under section 23 to ensure that the tax credit, of course, keeps pace with inflation.

Furthermore, our proposed tax credit covers a wide, wide scope of activities, far more comprehensive than the federal children's fitness tax credit. The Ontario tax credit would cover activities that fall into two categories, fitness and non-fitness—this is quite significant. I will go through the two categories. All eligible activities would be supervised and suitable for children—again, fitness activities and non-fitness activities, which is absolutely crucial to parents such as myself who have three boys in soccer and rowing, who need to be involved in those fitness activities, and then, of course, non-fitness activities for those like myself; I was part of the debating club and public speaking. This will also benefit non-fitness activities.

0910

The criteria for fitness activities would be the same as for the federal children's fitness tax credit. The activities

would require a significant amount of physical activity that contributes to cardio-respiratory endurance plus one or more of muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and balance.

For non-fitness activities to be eligible, they would have to fall under one of the following categories. I'm going to go through the categories, as this is so exciting for the non-fitness side of this tax credit: instruction in music, dramatic arts, dance and visual arts; language instruction; activities with a substantial focus on wilderness and the natural environment; activities with a substantial focus on helping children develop and use their intellectual skills; structured interaction among children where a supervisor teaches or helps children develop interpersonal skills so important to their existence in society today; or enrichment or tutoring in academic subjects.

For both fitness and non-fitness activities, programs would qualify as eligible programs if they conform to one of the following guidelines. I'll just go through the guidelines:

—a weekly program, not part of a school's curriculum, of a duration of eight or more consecutive weeks, in which all or substantially all the activities include a significant amount of qualifying activity;

—a program that is not part of a school's curriculum, of a duration of five or more consecutive days, of which more than 50% of the daily activity includes a significant amount of qualifying activity;

—a program that is not part of a school's curriculum, of a duration of eight or more consecutive weeks, offered to children by a club, association or any similar organization, in circumstances where the participants in the program may select a variety of activities, if more than 50% of the activities offered to children by the organization include a significant amount of qualifying activity, or more than 50% of the time scheduled for the activities offered to children in the program is scheduled with activities that include a significant amount of qualifying activity; and

—a membership in an organization that, again, is not part of a school's curriculum, of a duration of eight or more consecutive weeks, if more than 50% of the activity offered to children by the organization includes a significant amount of the qualifying activity.

If certain programs or memberships of a duration of eight or more consecutive weeks fail to qualify because 50% or fewer of the activities that are offered to children are eligible activities, then a proportional amount of the fees paid for that program or membership could qualify for the credit as well.

This tax credit would build on the significant measures we've already taken to support children's activities. Some of these significant steps include the after-school initiative, which I'm personally familiar with. This initiative provides youth in high-risk communities with after school programming. Programs in this particular initiative include healthy eating and nutrition education, which of course is always helpful in working to combat childhood obesity; physical activity to encourage active lifestyle;

personal health and wellness education, of course to promote self-esteem in our youth; and other activities with specific priorities that are based on local community needs.

Under an agreement between the government of Canada and the government of Ontario to fund sports programs for Ontario with a particular emphasis on enhancing opportunities for young people, aboriginal Canadians and people at risk, the government of Canada and the Ontario government are each contributing \$2.65 million, for a total of \$5.3 million over three years. Funding will go to projects such as the Track and Field Fitness project, which provides organized activity sessions for over 10,000 aboriginal children and young people in 60 First Nations communities. The Bridging the Gap Through School Sport project offers leadership training for senior students in the phys ed leadership course. The Sports Camps for Kids initiative helps Boys and Girls Clubs across Ontario to offer customized sports camps to over 5,000 children and young people at risk.

There has been \$4.5 million since 2006 under the Ontario international amateur sport hosting policy in a number of events, including the 2007 FIFA under-20 World Cup of soccer, the 2009 World Junior Hockey Championship, the 2009 World Wushu Championships and the 2010 International University Sports Federation's world university cross-country championship.

This is so important to our youth. From a personal perspective, our boys were at the 2007 FIFA under-20 soccer championships, and the way that these events affect their lives and create their encouragement, their interest and their desire to be a part of physical activity is absolutely immeasurable. So these are great steps that our government is taking.

The healthy communities fund is a one-window approach to funding local organizations for the delivery of health promotion initiatives. These would be initiatives that are related to physical activity, recreation, sport, healthy eating, injury prevention, substance and alcohol misuse and, of course, mental health. The healthy communities fund has provided an estimated \$21.9 million to 369 organizations across Ontario to deliver innovative health promotion programs. An educated and a healthy population, as we all know, is critical to the prosperity of Ontario. Our government believes in starting this lifelong process as early as we possibly can.

In addition to announcing the proposed new children's activity tax credit this month, September also marks the initial phase of implementing to make full-day learning available for four- and five-year-olds across the province of Ontario. Full-day kindergarten provides children with the foundation, the base, that they need for learning for a lifetime. It supports student achievement. It builds on the success that we've already achieved, as I earlier mentioned, in the lower primary class sizes and of course in the increase in the graduation rates. It's also a positive step towards supporting our province and the people of Ontario for the long term.

In the report Ontario in the Creative Age, Roger Martin and Richard Florida recommend: "Make early

childhood development a high priority.” This is the highest-payoff investment we can make in our long-run prosperity.

Nearly 600 Ontario schools currently offer full-day kindergarten, and it will be offered in more than 800 schools in September 2011. Our government’s goal is to have full-day kindergarten fully implemented in all Ontario elementary schools by 2015-16. This will employ up to an additional 3,800 teachers and 20,000 early childhood educators, and will benefit about 247,000 children in Ontario. This initiative will help to ensure that working parents continue to have access to quality child care and play an active, active role in the workforce.

Earlier this year, our government announced that it’s stepping in to permanently fill the gap left by the federal government with an investment of \$63.5 million a year to preserve 8,500 child care spaces, and this is just another example of the investments that our government is making to support the very foundation of our Open Ontario plan—and, of course, that’s Ontario’s people.

The McGuinty government remains committed to our Open Ontario plan, which we introduced last March. The Open Ontario plan lays the foundation of our government’s strategy to position the province for new opportunities, new jobs and, of course, new economic growth. It’s about reassessing how Ontario does business and how Ontario can best prepare for the times ahead. It’s about maximizing existing resources, consisting of people, programs and processes, to the best that they can be as the economic recovery takes hold. It’s about strengthening our province now as well as in the future.

0920

Ontario’s children, as we know, are Ontario’s future. I always say that Ontario’s future walks through the doors of our schools every day. An important part of our Open Ontario plan is about helping kids reach their full potential. With the proposed new tax credit, our government would be putting more money back into the pockets of moms and dads to help them provide their children with the kinds of activities that interest them the most.

We’ve gone through all the activities; we know that it covers a wide range of interests, and now moms and dads are going to have the opportunity to support their children with those interests. It’s the right thing to do for our kids, it’s the right thing to do for our economy and it’s the right thing to do for our communities. By helping to develop skills, fitness and, of course, the interests of children and youth of today, the government, as we said, is supporting a better future for all of us in Ontario.

In conclusion, the children’s activity tax credit would provide about \$75 million each year to assist with the cost of enrolling children in extracurricular activities and would benefit over 1.8 million children in about 1.1 million Ontario families. Parents want to make sure their children have the opportunities that they need to grow up strong and secure, and to become happy, caring and productive citizens of Ontario’s society. We need our students as well as our youth to become engaged citizens, to become part of Ontario’s future.

Our proposed new tax credit would make it just a little easier for parents to provide their children with these opportunities. That’s why I ask for the support of the House in passing this act to help Ontario families and Ontario parents, and to make it just that much easier to support their children to take these activities and to be involved in fitness and non-fitness activities, because it’s the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I’ll defer to John O’Toole.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just one second. Can it be deferred to a—?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Okay. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O’Toole: I just want to respond to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga and comment. First of all, we recognize the importance of making sure that all children have the opportunity to pursue extracurricular activities, and I think it is a very good sort of signal or recognition of the good work that the federal government of Stephen Harper is doing with his tax credit. I think that imitation is probably the finest form of flattery.

But the point here is, I’m a little concerned. First of all, if you look at it, it’s a very small, innocuous little bill. In the bill, it’s very specific that, first of all, you have to spend \$500. So families that are registering their children for hockey—let’s go through that for a moment, in the little time I have. The \$500, it would never be exactly \$500; it could be \$550 or \$600, and then there’d be tax on that. That’s 13% tax on this. Let’s just do the simple math. If it’s \$500 and it’s 10%, that’s \$50 tax; it’s actually more than that. We’re concerned about this as an action of the provincial government. For them to issue a cheque for \$50, it would probably cost \$50.

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: Twenty-five dollars. Well, I think there is going to be a direct cheque because with the last cheque they got for the HST implementation, the cheque came out and had a nice letter from Premier McGuinty, sort of patting himself on the back. So this is another government opportunity to get into the mailbox, and you are paying for it. You, the consumer, are actually paying for it. It’s your own money coming back to you. It’s an admission that the HST is a tax grab, and so—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I’d just like to say that this tax credit—any help for families is good. Unfortunately, the \$50, let’s take a look at that: If I had a boy in hockey or a girl in hockey, that might pay for 10 skate sharpenings. And then I’ve got to pay HST on top of that so I’ll be lucky if I get five skate sharpenings. Some of the places it costs \$180 just to register—just to register. Even baseball, you’ve got to pay for your uniform; you’ve got to pay for the registry.

This is a joke. This money will do absolutely nothing to help families.

Let's talk about piano lessons: average \$60 an hour; \$60 an hour, and you might go twice a week, maybe once a week to piano lessons. Wow: \$50. If you break that down over a year, it works out to be about 29 cents.

Every time the Liberals do something it's half done or a quarter done, and they put us in a position where we don't want to go against people getting money, but they fall short every time. They don't make it to second base, let alone home plate. This is absolutely a joke. It's peanuts. And they are going to get it back in HST. An average family, a family of four, is going to pay \$1,800 in the first two years of HST implementation, and they're going to send them a cheque for \$900. The people of Ontario aren't stupid. They've caught on to this, and at every door I've gone to, the people are ticked off.

So, once again, a nice present with a big bow on it that's not worth the paper it's written on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this particular piece of legislation. I just want to make a quick comment on something that the member from Durham just said a minute ago, that imitation is the highest sense of flattery. He thinks that copying the federal process was a good thing. The member needs to remember that not too long ago, we debated the tax reform and the HST, and that's something that was initiated by the same folks in Ottawa.

Let me talk about this particular piece of legislation. Yes, I heard from parents. I mean, I was a parent; I have nine grandkids, so I know what it takes to play hockey and soccer. But what I did hear, though, from those parents is: "Can you help us out a little bit?" They know that taxpayers' money needs to be spent wisely. "Can you help us out a little bit?" Because those families with those kids—I know what it costs to drive to hockey games and take your kids to practice.

I know that the folks I spoke to in my riding over the last week or so, when this announcement was made, are quite happy. Is there enough? I'm not sure what "enough" really is enough, but I know that they're very, very appreciative of at least the thought that we recognized, we listened, and we're now delivering.

The member from the NDP would say, "Well, this is nothing." Maybe \$50 to him is nothing, but I know to my daughter, to my son, to my grandkids, it is something. Yes, it doesn't pay the whole bill. No government ever paid for the whole bill. But anytime that we can help, I think it's something that we need to do, and keep our ears tuned to listen to other things that we can do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I guess when I heard this was happening, it was a clear admission, in my estimation, on the part of the government that the HST, in fact, was a mistake because you're having to fix things as you go along. The problem is you can't fix the whole problem unless you deal with it in a much bigger way. So a \$50 tax credit to a family, and the administration costs that

ensue—people are shaking their heads. They're saying, "What the heck is going on here? They're charging us hand over fist for things: more for energy, more for gas, more for hockey equipment, more for hockey registration, more for baseball registration, more for everything. And they're going to send us a cheque for \$50. Well, isn't that rich?" That's what people are saying to me. It's a joke.

0930

It's an absolute joke, and a clear admission that the HST was the wrong thing to do in the first place. If you're going to give a meaningful tax credit, I would herald it, but this \$50 is an insult to families who know that it costs you almost 50 bucks to send the cheque out.

People in Ontario have awakened. They have seen this government, continually over this term, not consult and institute higher costs in either taxes or fees without any consultation, and in most cases, with very little heads-up on what is going to happen and certainly no explanation. When a consultation is required and asked for by the people, it's denied. People won't look favourably on this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'm really quite encouraged to respond to the comments we've heard here. I think the first response I'll make is that I am a parent, and I have three sons in sports, both physical and non-physical. I tell you first-hand, the testimony of this parent is that that makes a difference. Every little bit helps, and I tell you first-hand, it does make a difference.

The NDP and the PCs can sit in the House and call this a joke. That's absolutely unacceptable.

You know what they're calling a joke? Let me just tell you what they're calling a joke. They're calling \$75 million every year a joke. They're sitting there saying that about benefiting and helping over 1.8 million children in the province of Ontario.

This will help 1.1 million families in Ontario. This is something that the McGuinty government is doing. We're doing it now, and it is helping families. For the Conservatives and the NDP to sit in this House and call it a joke is absolutely shameful. The McGuinty government is helping families. We are doing it now. I'll tell you where we're doing it again—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: We're doing it in areas that have never been done before—fitness and non-fitness. Young people who are involved in music, dramatic arts, visual arts: They are now going to be supported. Students who need language instruction are now going to receive support so parents can put their children in the language instruction that they need. Developmental needs that are crucial to students in this province in order to be successful in the future: Parents are receiving that support from the McGuinty government so that these children can prosper and flourish.

This is no joke. This is a wonderful thing to do for the youth of the province of Ontario, and I'm proud to stand here and support this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to debate Bill 99, which is An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the children's activity tax credit.

I note that the parliamentary assistant, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, was quite far-ranging in her comments talking about this bill because Bill 99 is all of a few pages. It's very thin. I noted that the member was talking about, it seemed like, every program to do with families and children that the Liberal government has, including full-day learning in kindergarten etc. I'm just pointing that out for the Speaker in case my comments happen to cover more than this specific tiny bill before us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Since the member has brought that up, that's a good point. I was listening, and I give members a little bit of latitude, but I like to hear them come back to the issue. That's my comment to you as well.

Mr. Norm Miller: I can say, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I shouldn't have brought that point up, then.

I will be sharing my time with the member from Durham, as well, because it is a fairly thin bill here.

I would like to comment that the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek did point out that it's only \$50, and he compared how many skate sharpenings that would pay for. I would simply say that, having played on the Legiskaters with the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, on the same line, I don't think it matters whether we have dull skates or sharp skates.

Now, back to the actual bill. I would simply say that, as the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek mentioned, this is like handing out crumbs when you've taken the whole loaf of bread from Ontario families. It's more about optics. It's certainly a small amount of money going back to Ontario families: \$50. I would say that for many families, they won't be able to afford to pay the \$500 to be able to get the \$50 back—it's a 10% tax credit—because so much has already been taken by the McGuinty government. I will go through some of the tax increases that are affecting Ontario families.

To begin with, let me just briefly go through the bill. It's fairly straightforward. You get a tax credit of up to \$50 by spending \$500 on certain approved sports programs that involve muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility or balance. That is modelled very much after the federal tax credit that is similar to this one—although the Ontario version also has other programs that qualify for the tax credit, and that's things like music, dramatic arts, dance, visual arts, language instruction, activities with a substantial focus on wilderness and the natural environment, activities with a substantial focus on helping children develop and use particular intellectual skills, structured interaction among children where super-

visors teach or help children develop interpersonal skills, or enrichment or tutoring in academic activities. It's \$50 based on spending \$500 for qualifying expenses and an additional \$50 for a disabled child, so the total would then be \$100 for two children, one being disabled. The tax refunds would come—I know this government likes to send cheques, and it would be administered by Revenue Canada, so it would come from the federal government.

I guess anything, even if it's crumbs coming back to Ontario families, is something that we would support. But as I will outline, Ontario families have been hit so hard that this will not make much difference for them. Fifty dollars is not going to go very far in terms of all the additional costs that Ontario families are facing.

That's more or less what the bill is about. It's pretty thin; it's pretty straightforward. Some of the eligible activities, just to expand on that a bit, are things like aerobics, Scouts or Cubs, cadets, badminton, chess, ball hockey or cooking for kids. There's actually a fairly long list of various qualifying activities that the Ontario government program is going to qualify for: Scouts, tennis—it goes on. However, as I say, our concern is that this is really a pittance. It's like taking a dollar and giving five cents back, except in the case of the McGuinty government, it's more like taking thousands of dollars, when you add up all of the additional charges, and giving \$50 back.

There's no argument that we need to do more to encourage physical activity in our society, particularly amongst children, because if, as a child, you get involved with sports, you learn the importance and you enjoy physical activity, there's more chance that that will become something you'll do for the rest of your life. I know some of the medical officers of health have pointed out that functional activity actually has the most benefit over a lifetime. I think they mean by "functional activity" where you're actually walking to work or riding to work—you're getting activity for a purpose. I'm sure one of the other speakers will elaborate on that once we receive more information from the medical officers of health who have looked at it.

0940

But certainly there are huge benefits for society in getting young people in particular to get more involved, to get healthier. Across North America, we definitely have an obesity problem. We have chronic diseases like diabetes that are on the upswing. I know I read an article in one of the newspapers last week saying that diabetes costs—I believe it's up to \$4.9 billion in Ontario, and it's predicted to be over \$7 billion by 2020. Obviously, getting people active at a young age and keeping them active their whole life has benefits for the health care costs, for quality of life and many other things.

That's part of the reason I have a private member's bill—that will be debated on Thursday—that, if it passes, would require provincial secondary highway shoulders to be paved when they're being rebuilt. That gives people more of an opportunity to cycle close to home, to cycle

when they're visiting an area—perhaps Prince Edward county, Manitoulin Island, Niagara, or Parry Sound–Muskoka would be one of the prime destinations. When they're visiting those areas, if there are more places to ride, then that will be an attraction for the area. It will also be a benefit for the people in the area. Doing things to encourage more physical activity, I agree with. I think there are lots of benefits to it.

Getting back to this bill, we're talking about a \$50 tax credit for families. I'd simply say that families in the province have faced so many increased costs; they're feeling very squeezed, and I certainly hear about it on a regular basis from my constituents. Look at some of the increased costs that have been passed on to families. We have a Toronto election going on right now. The government passed the City of Toronto Act. As a result of that, there's now a municipal land transfer tax and there's the personal vehicle tax on Toronto residents, so that the average Toronto home has gone up by \$3,000 and the cost for a Toronto family is about \$120 a year for a two-car family. Together, that's an additional \$381 million out of Toronto taxpayers' pocketbooks, and that's an additional cost.

Of course, we've seen one of the largest tax increases, despite the Premier saying he wouldn't increase taxes in a couple of elections: the Ontario health premium. That's a big cost for Ontario families. Despite that, of course, we still have seen challenges in the health care system. I know I certainly see it in my own riding, where Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is struggling to balance its budget. It's still projecting a deficit—I believe it's over \$3 million this year—despite having a deficit reduction plan and despite having made significant cuts, most recently cutting cafeteria services and shutting down the Burk's Falls health centre. Unfortunately, there's a lot of waste out there in the health system. So despite Ontario residents and families paying this new premium, which has generated over \$15 billion, we're still seeing cuts in health care, and that's an additional cost for Ontario families.

Energy is becoming a huge thing. I'm hearing from constituents who are watching their energy bills go up, and that's having a big effect on the family budget. Constituents are writing to me; they're concerned about all of the various energy charges and increases. It seems to be—I could go through them, but the smart meters are certainly one of them. In my area, they've installed smart meters but they haven't turned them on, yet everybody's bill has gone up. So I'm not sure what's going on with those smart meters, but I'm hearing from other MPPs, when we have our caucus meetings, that they're hearing the same story from constituents: that they get these new meters installed, and—I don't know whether they're having technical problems with them, but their bills seem to go up significantly. Most of that is anecdotal, but I would say it has been a very common theme from many MPPs I've talked to, and also from individual constituents.

I've got a letter here from—I won't name the constituent. I know they said we could read it, but I don't know

whether they necessarily want their name in Hansard. Here it is:

"I would like to add our concerns about the new hydro smart meters to others that I'm sure you have received. Our new meter was installed last August at our home on Kahshe Lake. We live here for six months of the year and it is closed" for up to six months.

"Our actual usage from October 15 to January 13 was 15 kilowatt hours per day. Most of that time, except for a few days, we weren't here and everything was off except for heating our little storage area to 10° degrees. "Then, under the same conditions, from only January 13 to February 11 our actual usage was 62 kilowatt hours per day! That's four times the usage per day under the exact same conditions! January may be a cold month, but, not enough to make anything like that difference!

"Then, the next month, under the exact same conditions and probably just as cold outside, we used 45 kilowatt hours per day!

"I believe that these meters have some kind of fault. Please take the time to question Hydro One about them."

They go on from there. That's not an uncommon—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, on the point you and I discussed earlier, you had equal time with the government member on a different topic. I would like to hear now about Bill 99.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I say, Bill 99 is about providing a few crumbs to Ontario families to relieve the burden of other increased fees that the government has brought about, so I was just illustrating some of the other increased fees. I think energy is certainly one of the areas. Ontario families are really noticing substantial increases in their energy bills. Unfortunately, that's something that is continuing. The forecast in the future looks very challenging. Energy is something that pretty much all families do have to pay for.

Of course, another increase that also affects energy is the fact that the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think we should nip this all in the bud, and we should keep our remarks to Bill 99. I don't recall seeing some of what you are discussing in Bill 99. Please.

Mr. Norm Miller: As I say, I think it does relate to Bill 99. I don't, of course, want to argue with the Speaker, because that would be against the rules—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller:—or challenge the Speaker, but Bill 99 is about giving a \$50 tax credit to Ontario families. I'm simply illustrating—and if I was able, I would like to illustrate how so many different costs have increased through the programs brought forward by the McGuinty government.

There's a long list that I have here of various tax increases that have been brought forward by the McGuinty government. I think the fact is that we've seen so many different increases for Ontario families on such a variety of staples that they require, energy certainly

being one of the things you can't live without in the province of Ontario—and the new HST, which applies to so many things that families depend on.

Many are related to Bill 99, because of the cost of being involved in sports. Sporting activities involve driving a car, for example. If your child is playing hockey, on dull or sharp skates, you have to get them to the hockey arena. I know in my case, I had three kids who played hockey, and living in rural Ontario, that involved thousands of kilometres a year. In fact, I think I'll call it the worst year when they were all playing on travel teams. We put about 50,000 kilometres on one winter getting around to various locations in Ontario, to various arenas.

Obviously, if you're buying fuel for 50,000 kilometres, with the new HST, it's going to be a lot of extra tax for Ontario families. This \$50 rebate would hardly cover the fuel for one trip to one game on one weekend. There are some real, substantial costs involved in participating in sports, but this bill is going to have a mere \$50 come back to Ontario families. I think that we as the opposition support anything, whether it's crumbs, that the McGuinty government decides to give back to Ontario families, but they've been faced with so many different large increases in the sorts of costs that they just can't avoid paying.

0950

Also, if you are going to travel to a soccer game or to figure skating or take your child to Scouts, one of the qualifying activities, you have to have an automobile, and you have to have insurance on that automobile. Recently, the government has made changes to auto insurance and, essentially, people will be paying more for automobile insurance and getting the same or less coverage. I just received a letter from a constituent here, and I'll just see if I can find the letter from my—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, you're really making it tough for the Speaker. The standing orders are very explicit. I try to give some latitude, but I think you're stretching it and I don't want everybody else to have to get into that position as well. So, please, Bill 99 is about some very specific issues which you could address. Please.

Interjections.

Mr. Norm Miller: The government members are making it difficult for me, Mr. Speaker.

We've made it clear that we'll support it even if it's crumbs coming back, \$50 crumbs coming back, despite the government taking thousands of dollars from the pockets of Ontario families. They're going to get a few crumbs back, and we're going to support them getting that bit of money coming back.

But I think it is important that the real concerns of Ontario families—and these are real letters from real people who are concerned with increasing costs they are facing that come out of the same budget that's going to give this \$50 back. I have a letter from a constituent very concerned about the fact that her auto insurance is going up and they're getting less coverage. That's part of the family budget that this \$50 is going to be going into. I

have letters from seniors concerned about the HST and how that's going to affect their ability to survive. Unless they have grandkids, they probably won't be getting the \$50 back, so they are out of luck there. The point I would like to make is simply that \$50 is relatively insignificant. I think it's more about optics, about politics, than it is about really benefiting Ontario families. Having said that, we're supporting them getting these few crumbs from the McGuinty government.

I'm sure the member from Durham—I think he's working on his notes right now—would like to make further comment. I would simply conclude by saying that this \$50 is relatively insignificant compared to all the various increased fees and taxes that have been brought about by the McGuinty government since 2003. It's thousands of dollars in increased taxes, thousands and thousands of dollars, and they're going to get a mere \$50 back for some families under this program that is now before the House in Bill 99.

With that, I will pass the floor on to the member from Durham.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know the member has made a very emphatic case that we would be supporting this but we are disappointed in the fact that, I guess, in the broadest sense—you've got to start at square one here. I think the Premier, in all fairness, listened. The outrage because of the HST, broadly, the cancellation of programs that would then be not affordable, some of which we've been talking about being hockey and other activities for young children—they would be paying HST; therefore it would become unaffordable.

If you look at the \$500, I guess you'd be paying about 13%, roughly, so it would be \$65 tax, and you're going to get back a tax credit of \$50. I think there's a maximum as well for a family of \$100 for, as has been mentioned, the case of a child with a disability. Up to the age of 18 they'd be eligible for up to \$100. That's pretty well what the bill says, but it has some other questionable language that needs to be addressed.

There was quite a good article in the *Globe and Mail*, I thought, for the viewer at home who might want to stay addressed to it. It says here, "Activities that are not related to sports would have to be supervised, suitable and not part of a school curriculum in order to be eligible, and would include programs such as drama, choir or Girl Guides."

You know, in some respects they haven't quite got it right. I think there's a couple of discriminatory things here, because technically, today what we're trying to do is encourage young people, and indeed older people, to stay active. Why are they having a tax, the HST, on gym memberships? We're trying to keep the active lifestyle, and I would endorse that.

I would propose an amendment here: that we change the age restrictions from 16 to anyone who's participating in an active activity or program. For instance, persons with Alzheimer's are encouraged to do Sudoku

and crosswords and social programs of interaction. Why are we discriminating against seniors? I think they've got it wrong. I think it's partially right—and I see the member smiling, the new minister. Congratulations, as well. But my point being, it's so skilfully cheating the people of Ontario—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Cheating?

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, "cheating," meaning not giving them their full reward. I mean, paying tax on a gym membership?

Obesity is a problem in many of the age groups. It's not just unique to young people, and one way of combating that is to encourage physical activity: walking to and from school or work, as I do. I walk up from the GO train at Union Station up to here pretty well every morning. I would think that at the Legislature, if they want to do something important here for members, they should have a change room and a shower room so as you walk up from the GO train and you're perspiring, you could have a shower and a change room. But if I had a membership at the University of Toronto Hart House, I would have to pay tax on that, HST. I should be able to get a refund. I should be able to get the tax refund, and so should anyone who's doing things that benefit themselves and society at large. We've got this health problem. You know, the unaffordability of the health care system is one of the topics that's in the media today.

So I'm saying that Bill 99 doesn't get it done. It's an admission that they went overboard on the HST; it's a clear admission. They've copied a program which the federal government, under Stephen Harper, initiated. Our leader, Tim Hudak, would probably work co-operatively if this was a fair tax credit, a reasonable solution to the heavy-handed HST that the people of Ontario are struggling with. This is about jobs and the economy.

The amendment that I think we should propose here—but our critic, Mr. Miller, has a solid hand on the finance file, I can tell you that. He has great experience in that as well. His dad, I believe, was a former Treasurer as well as a former Premier of Ontario. Mr. Miller's father brings a lot, and Mr. Miller does as well.

I think it's a cynical PR move, as has been said by some of the media. I'm looking at this from the Windsor Star—the members from Windsor should take heed here—in the paper just the other day: "Ontario finance minister Dwight Duncan is selling the new children's activity tax credit as a tax break for families who spend money on extracurricular activities for their kids.

"This is designed to make it more affordable for parents to have their kids in sports and cultural events." Duncan said. Covering everything from hockey and soccer to art lessons, the measure allows parents to deduct up to \$500 to receive an annual rebate of ... \$50 per child or \$100."

This is an admission. It's a cynical PR move, and I think the Windsor Star has it right. I would say that senior citizens' groups should be outraged that this is unfairly targeting children who—by the way, activities in school are exempt. Well, children playing some of the

musical instruments, often in programs today we're finding out, have to buy their own reeds for their wind instruments, and for string instruments.

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It's up to \$570 a year that the average family is paying in schools for extracurricular activities. Why aren't these eligible? Even for access to the Internet sometimes they're being charged, and other kinds of activities—sports equipment, as well as for theatre. Children perhaps have to forgo part-time jobs to take part in the school play. I remain concerned that this is nothing but an unfair, unpleasant way of dealing with a significant tax grab.

Bill 99 is only part of a solution to the dreaded HST. I think we've come to a complete admission. I see members on the government side shaking their heads. They know that this tax—we were seeing it yesterday on electricity. Mr. Shurman, the member from Thornhill, raised a very good point on the electricity bill going up 13%. Why don't we get a similar program?

This Bill 99 needs to go out for public consultations. I would encourage that. Let the people of Ontario have some say in this shifting, sliding, creeping tax grab that the HST is. I think there's room here. You'll find consensus on this side for more public hearings, and this Bill 99 is a good place to start. As I said, the whole bill itself—in fairness here, I've just finished reading it—is a page and a half. If you read the preamble to the bill, which is important to put on the record—the parliamentary assistant, the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, didn't take the time to do that. I'll just say that this is the explanatory note of the bill:

"The bill amends the Taxation Act, 2007, to implement a children's activity tax credit."

It goes on to say, "The children's activity tax credit is set out in the new section 103.1 of the act. The credit is refundable and is based on amounts that are indexed under section 23 of the act. For taxation years ending after 2009"—so you can't go back retroactively—"an individual is able to claim a credit in respect of expenses incurred in enrolling a qualifying child in a program of physical activity prescribed under the Income Tax Act (Canada) or a qualifying program. The maximum credit for 2010 is \$50 per qualifying child and an additional \$50 per qualifying child with a disability. The credit would be claimed in the tax return filed by the individual for the taxation year. Consequential amendments are made to subsections 84(1) and (3) of the act."

If you go into it, this is how much time they spent on this \$50 tax credit—and the amount of money they're going to spend on processing it. I can't believe it. To process a cheque, first of all the individual applying for it and their accountant—by the way, now they have to pay HST on that accountant's fee. When they apply, they have to retain their receipts. If you haven't retained your receipts, you're ineligible. So when you're registering your child in hockey or in a dance program or whatever activity or program, keep the receipts. The organization now has to specifically issue a receipt for tax purposes.

Those receipts will all have to be numbered, because you could be making them up. These are auditable statements now. They're not just some person teaching gym or jazz or whatever else; they have to have an accountable, valid tax receipt with a number on it and all the rest of it. That's more red tape for small business right there. The hockey teams now are going to have to have registered receipts. This is what I think. For \$50—wait a minute here. I don't think we can support this. It's just creating more red tape for the hockey leagues, for the dance groups, the theatre groups, for the hiking groups, whatever. It's just another bunch of red tape.

In fact—I didn't make this up—if you look, we're spending time this morning, and the government, in fairness to them—and I give them credit; at least they didn't spend an hour talking about nothing. It's a "Cynical PR Move." I think that sums it up. That's in the Windsor Star; that's the home paper for the Minister of Finance. They get it.

But when I go on here, then the Canada Revenue Agency has to actually audit the documents. They may have to send correspondence to the filing applicant to say, "You're missing a receipt," or "It's not a valid receipt." That person is probably making about \$80,000 a year, the auditor who's looking at the form. I can't believe it.

Then, if you're eligible—let's say you only spent \$499. Then there was tax. The tax can't be claimed as an expense. Say you paid \$480 to register the two children, or whatever it was, in hockey, dance, theatre or a play. The tax would bring it up to, let's say, \$530. It wouldn't be a \$500 expense because part of that expense was tax. Now an auditor is going to spend the whole morning talking to you on the phone about this: "You didn't have an expense of \$500. Therefore, you're not eligible."

I can't believe it. Look at the pile of red tape that they have created. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Rick Johnson: Read the bill.

Mr. John O'Toole: You haven't read the bill. I question—the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock needs to pay close attention here. The member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock should spend more time talking about wind turbines. You had the Premier down to implement this program in your riding. The Premier of the province went to his riding and—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): On a point of order, the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock: What standing order are you referring to?

Mr. Rick Johnson: The member is referring to things that aren't involved in Bill 99.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's not a point of order.

The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: With all due respect, he's a pleasant fellow. He had the Premier down to his riding to talk about Bill 99. It ended up there was a whole bunch of people from the Peterborough Regional Health Centre—the member from Peterborough is here—and they

were there protesting the layoffs at the Peterborough Regional Health Centre. The next thing is there was a big protest about the wind turbines in his riding. The whole program—it was on television.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: It was on CHEX Television. It was a week ago—two weeks this Thursday.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, there was. The member from Peterborough is interjecting now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Yes, and I would like you—

Mr. John O'Toole: The member for Peterborough is actually wrong—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Let's nip this one in the bud, too. The member for Durham, you're supposed to speak through the Chair. The responses on the government side can be limited, too, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think I've made the point that really—poorly—but the point being made, it's 72; we'll go for 72.

Speaking of 72, that's the other bill, the water bill. There's another bill where there's tax on water now. That's what that bill is about. I can tell you. I've read it. I spoke on it yesterday.

This is another case where our Premier, Premier Dad, has a spending problem. In fact, I would say this bill—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham, I can tell you that at our Speakers' meeting this morning, there were specific references that the Speaker this afternoon will refer to, and you've just used one of the ones we are not going to allow.

Mr. John O'Toole: In that case, it's still fairly legal until this afternoon. But I will respect that. I won't press the limit anymore.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You know what, folks? You can tell when members have nothing to say because they start talking about everything.

Mr. John O'Toole: The last comment by the Speaker is saying virtually what I'm saying: There's nothing in this bill. There's no money, there's no content, and there's no consideration for seniors.

I encourage our critic Mr. Miller from Parry Sound—Muskoka to actually move an amendment to make this tax credit eligible—the parliamentary assistant from Kitchener—Conestoga is here. I would extend this—this is a positive idea—to all persons, especially persons suffering under a medical condition, for participating in things, whether it's Alzheimer's, obesity or whatever, or even persons with diabetes and things like that—these growing chronic diseases—so that they could also get a tax credit. Now that is something that I think we could find unanimous consent for today on this bill. If you'd recognize that it isn't just a slick PR move—this is a real attempt to offset some of the onerous burdens of the HST. I hope the Premier's listening—in your office, probably with a coffee and your feet up on the desk. Nonetheless, I would hope that he's listening.

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I can commit that our leader, Tim Hudak, thinks fairness and reasonableness is the way to work together, working together with smart policies on tax changes, recognizing that this activity tax credit might need to go out for public hearings to expand the scope of it and the entitlements to other groups.

We've specified 16 and under; persons with disabilities, 18—what I'm suggesting is 65 and over as well.

The members from Northumberland and Peterborough might want to speak up in caucus on this, and I think Mr. Rinaldi and I are both over 65, so we'd probably qualify.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Hey, hey, I'm not. Speak for yourself.

Mr. John O'Toole: God, you look like you are. But anyway—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it's the pressure. It's the pressure you're under. I understand that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Maybe it's time I intervened again.

Mr. John O'Toole: These programs—if you read in section 2 of the bill, I think it's in section 103, clauses (a) and (b), here's what's not included: the cost of travel and accommodation, any amount that is an eligible fitness expense and any amount deducted under the federal act. If you've already claimed it federally, you don't get it.

Here's another thing: It goes on—and great language; I don't get the convoluted language. It says, "Ineligible activity' means an activity or type of activity prescribed by the Minister of Finance for the purposes of this section." There's a whole series of regulations of ineligible expenses or ineligible activities that have to be issued here and gazetted. It says, "Ineligible program' means a program or type of program prescribed by the Minister"—in other words, he hasn't really figured it all out yet—"of Finance for the purposes of this section."

Qualifying: Here's another—listen to all of the words to this thing. "Qualifying activity' means a supervised"—keyword: "supervised"—"activity suitable for children"—who's going to make these calls?—"that is not an ineligible activity"—wait a minute, here—"that does not promote illegal activity"—wait a minute—"and that involves one or more of the following ... " I can see more red tape here and abuse.

But Girl Guides, it specifically said—how about Scouting, Venturers and cadets? This summer, I attended a couple of programs where the sea cadets or the air cadets were demonstrating in their community in a positive activity. In fact, these are the young leaders of the future. I think those programs shouldn't have to go through a lot of red tape to qualify. Look, there are still expenses incurred when they're going to a camp for the air cadets or the sea cadets. Let's look at this and get it right.

Why are we trying to rush this through? I think it's like a lot of things that have happened over the summer; they screwed them up. Pardon my language. They didn't

implement them properly. I think we'll all admit that. The eco tax is a perfect example of the ill-conceived—they didn't even think about it. In fact, the minister basically had to step aside. Minister Gerretsen is, in all due respect, a nice fellow, but he is no longer the Minister of the Environment. Why? I think it's the eco tax. They dumped him.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, obviously he's not there anymore, and that program was shelved. But just stay tuned; it's only shelved for 90 days. There's another new tax coming on 9,000 products—an additional tax. Imagine taxing cars—an eco tax. They're already taxed to death: the gas they use. Every time you fill up with gas now, you're paying tax.

This seems to be a bit of overusing the time here a little bit, perhaps, but here's the point: It's clear the consistent result of everything that has happened here in the last year or so is more taxes.

Interjection: They should probably change their name to the Liberal taxation party.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Liberal tax-and-spend party. I think we should put a motion forward to change the name of Premier McGuinty's party to the tax-and-spend party, TSP. It's a nice acronym.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: We have lots of names: hard-working, committed, trustworthy.

There are a lot of things in this bill that I have looked at that I think need to be discussed in the public forum. I would call for public hearings on this bill and I would ask that you consider giving the tax credit to seniors who take the time to take care of themselves, fitness—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Tai chi.

Mr. John O'Toole: Tai chi, the member from Peterborough mentioned. I think these are extremely valid observations and I think we would support—I know our leader, Tim Hudak, spoke about it recently, his concern for senior citizens. In our caucus yesterday, he was in a very highly emotional state talking about the impact of the HST on seniors. He was thinking of his parents, I'm sure, and his young child as well, who are going to live in a regime where you're going to have to file first, probably, in this bill, the way I read it, to see if the program you're applying for is eligible. Because it's not quite described here yet. It's going to be done in regulation. It says that right here; that's on page 2 of the bill. I would suggest that somebody taking art lessons, for instance, would have to pay tax on the supplies. But I'm calling on the Premier in this debate today to have public hearings and to listen to seniors and consider them for those activity tax credits.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8(a), the House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce in the gallery today friends of ours from all across Ontario and my riding: Mr. Ed Borkowski, the new executive director of the Ontario Association of Food Banks; accompanying him this morning are Mr. Myles Vanni from the Inn of the Good Shepherd in Sarnia, and from Ottawa, Ms. Judy Dancause, the chair of the Ontario Association of Food Banks.

The Ontario Association of Food Banks will be meeting with all members today to talk about my private member's bill, Bill 78, a food bank donation tax credit for farmers. I'd ask you to welcome them to the Legislature today.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to introduce in the gallery today Kevin Somer, mayor of Smooth Rock Falls, and Harold Wilson, president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just before we begin question period today, I want to take a few minutes to follow up on comments made by myself yesterday and continue to address the matter of decorum.

Recognizing that question period is, by its very nature, an intense proceeding of this House and carries with it some latitude of behaviour, it should nevertheless be remembered that the public do watch, and there is an expectation of good conduct placed on all of us.

I am not so naive to deny that there may be other ambitions or aspirations involved in question period besides those of seeking information and holding the government to account. Nevertheless, that is the primary purpose of this proceeding, and there are certain principles that we can follow that would serve to move us in the direction of that outcome. Among those principles are the proper use of language and form of address.

First, it is helpful and serves to mitigate the likelihood of insult if members direct their remarks to me in the chair. Remember that. When you're standing up, don't be looking across the aisle; be looking at the Speaker. The talent of speaking in the third person may be one that many of you find difficult, but I ask that rather than hurling accusations directly at your colleagues across the floor, you make the effort to speak to me and through me. I will be reminding all members to do so more frequently.

Second, there's a long-standing tradition in this House that we refer to each other by title or riding name rather than given name. Doing so raises the level of debate from the personal to the professional and recognizes that we are here in representation of our constituency.

In the past, Speakers have exercised some latitude in the enforcement of this traditional guideline. For example, it has for many years been acceptable to make reference to a particular administration by the Premier's last name, as in the "Harris government," the "Eves government,"

the "Rae government" or the "McGuinty government," and I have no issue with that.

Where the use of names becomes problematic is when it is done in a manner that is disrespectful or mean-spirited, used in an insulting, accusatory or mocking tone or context intended to debase an individual member. It is unparliamentary, and it is unacceptable. You need only to look as far as yesterday's Hansard to understand what I mean. There are examples there from both sides of the House and throughout question period.

I know that all honourable members are astute enough to know the difference between temperate, respectful language and that which is insulting or offensive. Speaking through the Chair and properly addressing each other serves to enhance the level of discourse and raise the bar on decorum.

So take this as fair warning that I will be demanding a greater observance of this practice as we go forward. Thank you, members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SMART METERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier, or if not, then the Acting Premier, as the case may be: Premier, on April 20, 2004, you said to Ontario families that smart meters would "save you money." The Premier repeated that promise again on May 14, 2009, in a media release. Could the Premier inform the House exactly how much money smart meters have saved the average Ontario family?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I would think the Leader of the Opposition would be aware that we're in the process of installing smart meters across this province. There are 4.1 million or so that are installed as of today, and our goal is to have 4.5 million. I'd also suggest that time of use is part of what smart meters do. Indeed, smart meters are on the way to implementation as well.

The latest estimate we have is that about 800,000 people have smart meters installed in their homes at this point in time. It's far too soon to know what the precise savings will be for those particular individuals or for the system as a whole until, indeed, smart meters are much more further rolled out.

We do have studies that have been done, pilots that have been done, and in my supplementary, I'm happy to share the information that we have at this point in time with the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I thought I heard the minister say that he has no clue. He said that he doesn't know how much you're going to save families. The Premier promised that the smart meter experiment would save money for average families. You're hell-bent on putting millions of these across the province, and you're telling me that

you don't know what their impact is going to be? What level of incompetence has the energy policy of the McGuinity government descended to?

Let me put this in perspective—and back to the Premier. Families are struggling in Ontario today to make ends meet. Your smart meter experiment has been very expensive on the backs of seniors and small businesses, and you can't tell us if they'll save money or not. Premier, won't you admit that your expensive smart meter experiment has gone badly off the rails?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This is not just about the prospect of consumption management, although that's very, very important. Smart meters do a lot of things, and I think it's very important that all members in this Legislature recognize that the investment in smart meters is a very important investment as we build out our smart grid, as we prepare our energy system to take on the challenges of the future that consumers, businesses, our government—all Ontarians—are going to face.

1040

It's about ensuring that we have precise details to energy providers when there's an outage or a malfunction on the grid—that's an improvement to our system. It's about enhanced accuracy on meter reads. It's about reducing tampering and theft of electricity. It's about environmental benefits as a result of load shifting. It's about proactive customer service when outages and malfunctions are immediately known. And it is, indeed, about enabling time of use—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister says that smart meters do a lot of things, but what I'm hearing about when I talk to Ontario families across the province is one thing they do do, and that's squeeze more money out of the wallets of hard-working Ontario families. These are not smart meters; they're nothing but Dalton McGuinity's latest tax machine—

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

I will remind the honourable member of the statement that I just made that we refer to either the government or a position or a riding.

Mr. Tim Hudak: These smart meters are nothing more than tax machines. Minister, you know that they're very expensive to install. You know that there have been serious questions about reliability and accuracy, to the point where Measurement Canada reported that your smart meters do not meet federal standards.

I'm going to ask you, Minister: Given the great problems you've had, given the announcement yesterday that you're backtracking once again on off-peak power, given it's nothing more than a tax grab, won't you do the right thing and set this aside until you get this program right, and freeze this program today?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We all know, and it's important that Ontarians know, that the Leader of the Opposition simply does not support the important and critical investments we're making in our energy system to build a stronger, more reliable and cleaner system of energy. He

wants to take us back to the days when the Leader of the Opposition was serving in cabinet, when his policies and the policies of his government of that day created a weak, unreliable and dirty system of energy that was polluting our air, impacting the health of our kids and impacting the future health of our grandkids.

We have come too far, Ontarians have worked too hard to go back to those days of a weak, unreliable and dirty system of energy. This government cares about the future of our kids. This government cares about the future of our economy. This government cares about our energy future—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Stop the clock. Members will please come to order.

New question.

SMART METERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Premier. Premier, the Ontario PCs have opposed your smart meter experiment from day one because we knew that your smart meters were nothing more than expensive tax machines that would hit families and seniors hard. They have gone badly off the rails. There are serious questions about their accuracy. They have become very expensive to install, and you signal that you are once again backtracking on the rates you're charging for time of use.

Premier, I'll ask you to do the right thing. Will you admit that this program has gone badly off the rails, freeze it now, and fix the problems before you put one more smart meter in a family's home across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinity: This is our third day of question period, and I sense a lot of negativity from the leader of the official opposition. There are a lot of things—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinity: As I was saying, I sense a lot of negativity from the leader of the official opposition these days. Apparently there are many things that he does not like about Ontario. On the other hand, there are many things that we do like about Ontario. We're proud of the work that Ontarians continue to do working together, whether it's involving moving ahead with public education, the quality of education we offer our children, the quality of health care that we offer all our families, or the work that we continue to do together to ensure that we have in place a modern, reliable, clean electricity system.

I hear on a regular basis from the leader of the official opposition about what he doesn't like, but I've never heard him put forward a single positive policy proposal, and I'd like to hear that from him—

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, simply do the right thing. Freeze your program in place and fix the growing problems with your expensive smart meter experiment. Quite frankly, Ontario families cannot afford Dalton McGuinty's expensive energy experiments anymore—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member again of my statement that I made and remind all members they are to use titles, riding names or ministries. Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Quite frankly, families face the choice of a Premier who wants to lecture seniors to do their dishwashing after 11 p.m., to do their laundry at 2 in the morning, to tell families with kids to get them up at 4 or 5 in the morning to have their showers; we, instead, believe consumers should have a choice.

We believe families make the best decisions for their own household budgets. I'd ask the Premier to freeze this program and offer families a choice on whether they want to participate going forward.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague begins with a very negative outlook on the people of Ontario.

We believe that they actually want us, in a positive way, to build a new, reliable, clean electricity system. We believe they want us to invest, for example, in that massive expansion of hydroelectric capacity at Niagara Falls. We think they do want to be given the opportunity to participate in savings in their own home and electricity conservation through smart meters.

I think one of the shared responsibilities we have on all sides of this House is to make sure that the consumers, householders, have access to good-quality information about smart meters that we're introducing into their homes, about the new options that it creates for them so that they can participate in this exciting new development here in Ontario as, together, we build a reliable, clean, energy-efficient electricity system.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, I stand with families who believe that they, not the Premier, can decide best how to conserve energy and lower their power use. While the McGuinty government favours using sticks to drive up costs on consumers through hydro and through taxes, we want to put more carrots in the system, more incentives, and give consumers choice on how they approach their energy bills.

Premier, this has gone badly off the rails. Your minister admitted he had no clue what the cost is going to be to Ontario families, and you have taken us down a multi-billion-dollar expensive energy experiment that is hitting seniors and families hard.

Will you do the right thing, Premier? Freeze this in place, fix this program, give families a choice, and quit going after their pocketbooks.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, my honourable colleague is against smart meters. He's against giving Ontario householders a new choice, a new option available

to them with respect to the usage of electricity. He's against full-day—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier. Members will please come to order. Member from Halton. Member from Durham. Minister of Community Safety.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're also aware, of course, that he's against full-day kindergarten. We're also aware that he's against the tax provisions that we put in place to help Ontario families. Again, I say, on behalf of the people of Ontario, there will come a point in time—I think we're fast approaching that—when the leader of the official opposition might want to put forward some positive policy proposals so we get a better sense of where it is that he wants to go.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier admitted yesterday that the current smart meter pricing scheme simply isn't working.

My question is a simple one: Will he rule out a rate hike during daytime hours?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think my honourable colleague knows that we don't live in that particular world; we live in this one. The fact of the matter is we live in a world where we are building a new reliable, clean, modern electricity system. There are new costs associated with that.

For example, we've already brought online 8,000 megawatts of new generation. We have invested some \$8 billion in that new generation. We're also investing—I think it's close to \$4 billion—in some 5,000 kilometres of new transmission. There are some real costs associated with building that modern, reliable, clean electricity system.

The leader of the NDP knows that, and I'm sure she wants to understand that and make sure that when she addresses these kinds of issues, she's not telling us that the price of electricity can never, ever go up in the province of Ontario.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier keeps defending this latest boondoggle that his government has brought forward, but seniors and families simply cannot afford another single penny on their hydro bills. So why won't the Premier rule out increases that will bring those rates to 10, 11 or 12 cents per kilowatt hour?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Clearly the leader of the opposition is totally misinformed. This project is on budget, it is on time, and indeed, there are 4.1 million meters that have been installed to date, on the way to 4.5 million. She really doesn't know what she's talking about when it comes to the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I will continue to stand up through the question period, as I commented earlier, endeavouring to do my best to ensure that we conduct ourselves in a professional manner and not make comments as were just made. I would just ask that you withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to withdraw that.

The fact is, I think what the leader of the opposition really ought to be sharing with Ontarians is, what would she replace our aging infrastructure with? What kind of meters would she want to be installing our aging infrastructure with? Would she want us to be using past technology or would she want us to be modernizing our technology?

There is a cost to modernization of our energy technology. There is a cost to giving the opportunity for Ontarians to be able to shift their usage from peak usage. But at the end of the day—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This billion-dollar boondoggle is breaking the budgets of families in this province. That's what this minister needs to be aware of. Yet the Premier and his minister both agree that they think this turkey is actually going to fly in the province of Ontario. But seniors like Ralph Addison tell us that being gouged doesn't help to conserve energy. He says this: "I am a retiree living primarily on investment income. Smart meters will add about 35% to my monthly hydro bill, as I stay home in the summer.... Where is the fairness in that?"

Will the Premier tell Mr. Addison today that he won't be raising hydro rates during daytime hours?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Premier and I and our government from day one have said that as this program is implemented, we're going to continually be reviewing the differential between peak use and non-peak use to ensure that we get it to a really effective balance where those who are shifting use will have the incentive to do so, and those who are unable to shift their use are not unduly harmed by that.

This program is in the implementation of being installed. The NDP is already offside on a project and a program that is going to be able to help conserve, to help shift the use of energy, to help reduce the tension in our system in terms of having to build more energy supply. One would think that their critic would be very much at odds with the—

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

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. The Premier's plan isn't saving energy but it is definitely hurting people. These are the stories that we are hearing. Mrs. Duff writes this: "My husband and I are retired and living on a fixed income. My hydro bill with

the new smart meter has cost us our social life.... We no longer go to bingo or even a movie."

My question is: Will the Premier be raising rates during daytime hours?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to be very clear because I think we owe this to each other and we owe it to Ontarians: Electricity rates in the province of Ontario are going up. It may be that my colleagues opposite are proposing a rate freeze. If that is their policy, I think it's important that they make that public. But on this side of the House we've got to contend with reality. We inherited an electricity system that was weak, unreliable and dirty. We're investing billions and billions of dollars into modernizing a system so that it's strong, reliable and clean. We think that's the responsible thing to do. We'll work as hard as we can to keep rates down as much as we can, but we will continue to invest in a strong, reliable, modern, clean system, and there is—I think it's important to be clear on this—a cost associated with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People already feel that they're being gouged under this Premier's pricing scheme.

Chris Savoia writes this: "The actual increase to my latest hydro bills has been in excess of 80% ... my bills have averaged less than \$80 a month...."

"Suddenly the new meters come in ... and I find myself paying an average of \$140 per month."

Can the Premier guarantee Mr. Savoia that he won't be jacking his rates higher in a desperate bid to make this boondoggle scheme work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I will try to lend a little bit more definition to the difference between that side and this side of the House.

We're going to work as hard as we can to keep rates down as low as we possibly can, but I want to be direct with the people of Ontario. We inherited a system that was weak, unreliable and dirty. It was not in keeping with our expectations, not in keeping with our standards, and, frankly, not in keeping with the values that we share as a people. So we have taken this responsibility on.

We've had our shoulder to the wheel for some time now. We are making massive investments in new generation, clean generation. We're making massive investments in new transmission. At the same time, through our green energy plan, we are creating thousands and thousands of new jobs. There is a cost associated with that, but we're going to work as hard as we can to keep those costs down for consumers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. As I'm sure when the leader of the official opposition asks a question he wants to hear an answer, I know that the honourable members would want to offer that same respect to the leader of the third party. I would just ask that they be conscious that when somebody is responding to a question that the honourable leader of the third party asked, they give that leader the courtesy of hearing the answer.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government has already blown more than a billion dollars on the smart meters plan, but people are not conserving energy. They simply are not conserving. The Premier admits that his scheme isn't working; he says he wants to provide an incentive to them. On behalf of the people all over this province, all over Ontario, who are already getting the shock of their lives when they open their hydro bills, I want to know: Is this Premier planning to raise their rates in a desperate attempt to make this scheme fly?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think it's really important that we be clear on this because it's a very important public policy debate. My honourable colleague the leader of the NDP is, I believe, proposing the same thing as the leader of the official opposition, and that is that we impose a rate freeze on electricity rates in the province of Ontario.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Push it to the tax base, just like you guys did.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to be very clear: What that means is that you push those costs over to the tax base. You transfer those costs over to taxpayers. That's not something we're prepared to do.

What we are prepared to do and what we have been doing is investing heavily in a new, modern, clean, reliable electricity system: billions of dollars in new generation like that massive project at Niagara Falls and the massive project over the Lower Mattagami in northern Ontario. We're going to continue to invest massively in transmission projects and we're going to work as hard as we possibly can to keep rates down for consumers. But we want to assure them that when they go to the wall and flick the switch, the lights—

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: It looks like the Premier and the energy minister's defence of this hydro rate hike is scaring half of the caucus members out of this place.

My question is for the Premier. A Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters report added up the cost of your hydro rate increases. Since today, since the increases already, it said that Ottawa families will face a further 42% rate hike by 2015. Data from the same report says that your hydro increases will make families in North Bay pay 43% more, families in Peterborough will pay 44% more, and you're making families in Barrie, Markham and Richmond Hill pay 45.5% more. Just how much more will families have to pay for your hydro policies after 2015?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted that the member has asked this question because it gives me an opportunity to talk about a very important initiative that our government moved forward to over the course of the break, an initiative that, frankly, we moved forward to in

consultation with many of the big industries in this province to ensure that we gave those industries the opportunity to engage in conservation measures, to shift their use from peak use and lower their energy costs as a result. The result of this initiative—and this is not just according to the Minister of Energy; this is according to those industries—is, they will be able to increase their production, increase the amount of jobs that they're creating in this province, lower their energy costs and lower the costs to the entire system. It's a smart thing to do, and I'm very glad the member brought this question up because it gave me an opportunity to—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: People won't be able to afford those products they're producing because they can't afford their hydro bill. Dalton McGuinty doesn't have a plan—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member of the statement that I made earlier: that we refer to positions, ministries or ridings.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Premier doesn't have a plan, but don't take my word for it; take the word of the energy minister, who recently confessed in a media interview that, "We're in the process now of putting together our long-term energy plan." Seven years in office. There used to be a plan but George Smitherman ripped it up four years ago.

The McGuinty Liberals are making families pay hundreds of dollars more for their hydro rate increases, Samsung deals, windmills, back-door energy tax and an HST on top of it all. How could you, Premier, have taken families down this path without a plan?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That is almost laughable coming from the other side of the House. What we've been talking about over the last number of years is our plan to build a stronger, more stable and cleaner energy system. Maybe the member hasn't heard of the Green Energy Act, which is creating thousands of megawatts of clean energy in this province. Maybe the member hasn't heard about our plan to get off coal by the year 2014, which is going to be cleaning our air and improving our health. Maybe the member hasn't heard about the 8,000 megawatts of power that we have brought on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The same comment I made in regard to the leader of the third party—I think the honourable member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke would like to hear the answer as well.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind all members, again, to have that respect for the discourse of the question and the answer. Please continue.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I find it hard to believe, after all this effort on behalf of Ontarians, on behalf of our government to transform the weak, unreliable and dirty system of energy that we inherited to a strong, reliable and clean system, that the member would not have

recognized this plan that we have had for a very long time in place—

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

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. If the Premier and his finance minister had seriously considered the Expert Commission on Pensions recommendation for an Ontario pension agency and implemented it, Nortel workers would not be in the position they're in now. The mandate of that proposed agency was to deal precisely with these situations, ensuring pension stability and providing cost savings for taxpayers.

You had two years to implement your own expert's recommendation. Why didn't you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member is wrong. It would not have done anything that he's suggesting. It's unfortunate that he doesn't want to acknowledge the fact that not only have we moved on, as I recall, almost 80% of the recommendations contained in that report, but what we are doing is trying to build more sustainable pensions for all Ontarians and ensure their proper regulation. We have looked very carefully at the proposal by some of the Nortel pensioners and rejected it because what it will do is make the \$2.5-billion vastly underfunded pension more risky. It will cause greater anxiety for pensioners, and in fact, it has been rejected by a number of those pensioners themselves, as well as people on disability who are not pensioners. You ought not to be exposing those people to greater risk on their future income and security.

We have taken the appropriate—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: The minister is totally wrong. Nortel pensioners negotiated in the courts an extension from March 30 to September 30 to continue to work with your level of government on a win-win alternative to windup by annuity, but your government has stalled them at every front, trying to run out the clock. The recommended financial sponsorship model will save the pension benefits guarantee fund about \$100 million. Why are you ignoring these savings by implementing the costly windup by annuity?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Because it will expose those people who are already paying too great a price to even greater risk. That's why the leaders of the disabled Nortel workers have said no to you. That's why the disabled workers at Nortel and other pensions have told you unequivocally that they don't want you to threaten the security of their pension.

This is an unfortunate circumstance. We have invested \$250 million in the pension benefits guarantee fund. That will likely protect the pension benefits of some 90% of Nortel retirees and future pensioners.

We cannot take risks like the member opposite wants to do. We've seen this movie before. People have been left exposed across a range of industries. We'll continue to build a stronger and better pension system based on the recommendations of Professor Arthurs and many others.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is directly to the Premier. You know that currently we have First Nations leaders out on the front lawn, we have mayors from northeastern Ontario, some of whom are with us here today, and we have chambers of commerce from across northern Ontario, who are all gathering on one issue, and that is to say, "Stop the process on Bill 191, the Far North planning act." None of them see this as a resolution to the issue that needs to be dealt with.

First Nations want a land use planning process, but one that protects their interests and something that allows, at the end of the day, certainty for those who are going to invest in the area in a way that makes sure that we protect our environment.

The question is to you, Premier. Are you prepared to put the brakes on this process and respect the new relationship that you say you have with First Nations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm really pleased to answer the question, and I want to tell the member from Timmins—James Bay that we respect the rights of aboriginal people and we are happy that they are here to express their concerns in a respectful, peaceful and responsible manner.

We've been listening to their concerns for the last two years, in fact. I went up to the north this summer, visited eight communities and spent whole days listening to First Nations communities. We've listened during standing committee on Monday, and I was impressed with the level of discourse about the bill. I appreciated your suggestions on how the bill could be made better. I continue to listen. This is just the beginning of a listening dialogue with our First Nations communities, because we want to protect the north as well as provide environmental protection. The boreal forest is an extraordinarily important commitment for this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, if you're listening, why are they out on the front lawn? They're not here all the way from places like Kasabonika, Sandy Lake, Attawapiskat, Thunder Bay, Smooth Rock Falls, Timmins and other communities because they like what you're doing. They understand that the development of the Far North is important to northern Ontario, but we all understand in the north that if development is to happen, it has to be in a way that will benefit First Nations. This bill doesn't do that. So get off of this high horse, saying that you've consulted, because they're out on the front lawn telling you no.

I ask you again, will you do what we have suggested in the New Democratic Party and back off and go into a

process that allows us to get where we need to go at the end so that First Nations' interests are protected and the people of northern Ontario can also benefit from those economic activities?

1110

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Should Bill 191 pass, we believe that it will take concrete action to make a positive difference in the Far North. We understand that they need economic help and social help. This bill is going to provide the tools to provide that framework.

There's a lot of activity happening in the north. We know that the Ring of Fire is just one of those projects. There are going to be hydroelectricity projects and forestry projects. We need to give First Nations the capacity and the skills training. They need the resources to come into their community. Each individual chief has told me how interested they are in development coming to the north.

We believe this is the right thing to do. Our government is moving forward and having that conversation with First Nations communities. We know that it's important to protect the Far North. It's an asset, it's a jewel, and we need to protect it. This legislation will work with First Nations. We continue the dialogue.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, it's clear to all of us that a difficult economy means companies, investors and governments are facing very tough decisions on investments in uncertain times around the world. As we begin recovering from the economic downturn, the availability of venture capital is especially important, as banks have become more cautious in their lending and investors look to stable returns.

Innovative high-growth companies in the province are seeking venture capital funding to expand business opportunities and create jobs for Ontario families. They are companies like Energate in Ottawa that are looking to grow and prosper but need help raising capital.

Would the minister tell us what he is doing through his ministry to support these emerging companies that have an idea or product but lack sufficient funding?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is a centrepiece of our Open Ontario plan. In fact, we have created the \$250-million Ontario emerging technologies fund to co-invest with qualified investors in high-potential companies in three sectors: clean technologies, life sciences and advanced health technologies, and digital media.

To date, the Ontario Capital Growth Corp. has successfully closed and announced not one, not two, but eight investments under the OETF with Avvasi, Bering Media Inc., ecobee, EnviroTower, Energate, b5media, Morega Systems and Natrrix Separations. We have already leveraged institutional investors, corporate investors and our partners in the federal government to establish a \$205-million Ontario venture capital fund, and Ontario has committed \$90 million towards that. This signals—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It is important that the government is committed to ensuring that Ontario, the economic engine of Canada, remains on the cutting edge of research and innovation. This is especially critical as we grow out of the great recession and compete with the world for new investments and jobs for the 21st century. We must compete vigorously with other jurisdictions like Quebec and British Columbia to leverage private investment money into Ontario business for the benefit of Ontario's economy and families.

I've been speaking with businesses in my riding and organizations such as OCRI, the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation, about the challenge of leveraging venture capital. Could the minister tell my local innovators what this government is doing to support them in leveraging private venture capital?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We understand, in this government, that wealth is increasingly generated by the innovation economy and that our production economy's success is increasingly reliant on innovation. The \$65 million underlying the fund commitment is expected to raise between \$300 million and \$500 million in total funds from the three current Ontario funds in our Open Ontario plan, but it's sometimes more powerful to tell a story.

I'll give you one example: EnviroTower Inc., which I mentioned earlier, is a water treatment company with an environmentally sustainable solution to the challenges of using water cooling in towers, offices and other buildings. This technology typically delivers savings of 20% in water consumption and 15% in water cooling systems and jobs.

This is more investment in Ontario, this is direct forward investment, this is new jobs, and this is what Ontario—

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

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, Premier McGuinty summed up why he is out of touch and why Ontario families can no longer afford him when he insisted Ontarians, including aboriginal communities, support his Far North Act. It's an odd thing to say given that he's scrapped public hearings, his northern caucus has cleared their seats in the backbench and northern Ontario families and aboriginal leaders have travelled to Queen's Park to protest against the bill.

Just who was in the room with Premier McGuinty who supported this bill? Or was the Premier looking into a mirror?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to answer this question. I'll admit I was disappointed when the hearings weren't going up north this summer, but it was a great

opportunity for me. I myself got to visit eight different communities, and I've chatted with at least 25 chiefs and counting about the legislation. I was very impressed with a lot of the presentations. We had elders, we had young people come out and talk about the legislation and how to improve it. A lot of that discussion informed the changes that we made to the bill.

We've done some very different things with this bill. In fact, we went out last summer and we've gone out this summer to get that advice from the First Nations community. We are listening. We continue to listen to First Nations communities. They've given us some very helpful suggestions on how to make this historic legislation.

This is about providing a balance between protecting the environment and allowing economic development to continue. It's a good thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again, to the Premier. Premier McGuinty hasn't even been in the same room as the aboriginal and northern Ontario families whose economic opportunities he's cutting in half. What the McGuinty Liberals offer families is scrapped consultations so he doesn't have to listen to them. The choice Tim Hudak and the Ontario PCs are offering is respect, respect for families living in the north who want to prosper by exploring economic opportunities in their region—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will please come to order.

Mr. Steve Clark: You don't like to hear the truth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Start the clock, and it's not helpful from the member from Leeds-Grenville.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Or the Minister of Economic Development. Please continue, honourable member.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The choice Tim Hudak and the Ontario PCs are offering is respect, respect for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock, please. It is all about respect in here, and the same comments that I made I would ask that you do of your own leader and be conscious of that as well, too.

Mr. Randy Hillier: We offer respect for families living in the north who want to prosper by exploring economic opportunities in their region. They don't want their land base frozen into a massive park.

Premier McGuinty says northern Ontario families want this bill. They say they don't. Who's lying?

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Withdraw.

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

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm really pleased to talk about Bill 191 because I think it's a commitment of our government that I am particularly proud of. It's going to do

three things: It's going to provide certainty for businesses on how they can operate in the Far North; it's going to give local First Nations a voice about where, when and if development will occur; and it will provide environmental protection for the boreal forest, which will assist Ontario in fighting climate change. Those are really good goals to have, and I would have thought that you would be supportive of that, but you just don't get it.

There are so many opportunities in the north, and we are particularly pleased with providing certainty to businesses as well as First Nations communities. We're going to work respectfully with our First Nations communities and northern communities. I have travelled the north, I continue to have that conversation and I appreciate the advice that you provide, but I'm going to keep working towards making sure that we provide—

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

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The closure of Siemens Hamilton gas turbine plant is a blow to 550 workers, their families and the city's economy. Now Siemens is shopping for an Ontario location to manufacture wind turbines. The existing Hamilton plant is a logical location; it's the logical choice. Further to my recent letter to the Premier on this matter, I want to ask what steps he has taken to encourage Siemens to retool that Hamilton plant for wind turbine manufacturing.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to continue, first of all, to say that we very much value Siemens's investment in Ontario and we're going to continue to work with them to ensure they remain here. Obviously Hamilton is a very attractive locale. What I really want to point out as well is that the honourable member has been saying for some time now that she is opposed to our Green Energy Act, and now a company, which is exploring expansion here and doing work here on the very premise of our Green Energy Act, is looking for work here, looking for a location, and she's standing in favour of that.

So I'd just like her to get her story straight and decide whether she's in favour of the Green Energy Act or not. We are. We understand the financial upsides, the economic upsides, it has for our economy, and we'll continue to promote that.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think this Premier is quite aware that Siemens will receive millions of public dollars for the wind turbine manufacturing. I think he's quite aware of that. New Democrats believe that these public investments should actually come with strings attached. We've been saying that over and over and over again. Perhaps the Premier hasn't heard it.

Telling Siemens to return to the Milton Avenue plant in Hamilton, with its skilled CAW workers and road, rail and water links, makes perfect sense. The workers and their families simply want to know why the Premier

won't insist that Siemens do just that and invest in our community.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We believe Hamilton is a great place for anybody to invest. The members that we have representing that area have worked very hard to ensure that this government has invested in Hamilton in infrastructure and invested in Hamilton in energy, and we know the Green Energy Act is going to work for Hamilton as well.

I think the people of Hamilton would be very interested in this question because they would want to know that the leader of the opposition is trying to take credit for jobs that may go to her community, jobs that she did not support in the first place, jobs that she does not support to this day. That's something that I think would be important and of interest to the people of Hamilton. I think that's shameful.

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. M. Aileen Carroll: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. In my riding of Barrie, the ecological balance of the beautiful lakes in our community is a major concern and a major priority. All lakes, as you know, contain phosphorus, a natural, growing and occurring nutrient, that all things that live need to grow, but it has become—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. If there are issues pertaining to the question that was just asked previously and there is discussion that wants to continue, I think on behalf of all the members I would prefer that discussion to take place in one of the outer chambers or outside so that it doesn't interfere in the business of the House.

Please continue.

Mrs. M. Aileen Carroll: Concerning phosphorus, it has become far too abundant in Lake Simcoe and, indeed, results in excessive plant growth. I know, talking this summer to fishermen and talking to cottagers, that it's an ongoing problem, that there's a lot of concern about that, worry about the declining fish population and other ecosystem damage.

I'm wondering if the minister can please tell this House if the McGuinty government is serious about taking action to protect Lake Simcoe.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I can assure my friend that we are absolutely committed to protecting Lake Simcoe. That is why we brought in the Lake Simcoe Protection Act. I would note that there has been no stronger advocate in this House than my colleague and friend the MPP for Barrie on this issue.

She is absolutely correct: It is about making sure that we reduce the amount of phosphorus going into the lake so it is restored to its ecological health. That's why we have a phosphorus reduction plan that sees the phosphorus going into the lake reduced from the current level,

which is 72 tonnes per year, to 44 tonnes per year. That's a reduction of some 40%.

It's that key point that is necessary. We need everyone within the community, everyone within the lakeshed of Lake Simcoe to play their part. We will play our part through the act and through the regulations to ensure that we have that balance that is required by Mother Nature so that we can enjoy Lake Simcoe for many, many years to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. M. Aileen Carroll: My constituents will be pleased to know that the McGuinty government remains committed to taking action to clean up and protect the lake, and they'll be happy, indeed, to know that the phosphorus reduction strategy is only one part of a larger plan.

As you mentioned, the larger Lake Simcoe Protection Act enshrined watershed protection into law and will clean up Lake Simcoe, protecting it for the next generation. But phosphorus reduction alone isn't enough. Can you please share with the House and my constituents—very important—a progress update on the Lake Simcoe Protection Act and what else you're going to do to protect this beautiful lake?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I thank my friend for the supplementary because under the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, which was proclaimed in the House on June 2, 2009, we have the concept of having a protection plan. We were able to get some wonderful recommendations about what we need to do to go forward, some 119 recommendations. I'm proud to share with the House that we have some 88 of those recommendations in the first year already in place or under way.

I can remind the member that we have established a Lake Simcoe science committee and a Lake Simcoe coordinating committee to provide guidance and expertise on the protection efforts. It's important that it's always based on sound science. We've released the Lake Simcoe water quality report, which provides baseline information for the past 29 years of water quality monitoring of the lake, to make sure that information is available, and we are implementing a state-of-the-art fisheries and aquatic biodiversity monitoring—

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

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I have a question for the Premier. Premier, I want to talk to you about the sorry mess of the pensions from Nortel. This particular pension plan is going to be handed over to you on September 30. Let us remember that \$2.5 billion of this pension plan is their money; it's not the government's money. The pensioners have met with me and many members of this Legislature, and I do not take away from the intent of any member of this Legislature to try to do the best we can with, I say, the sorry state of affairs. The pensioners, though, are frustrated because they have presented an

alternative to you, the financial sponsorship model, but the answers they have received back don't make sense to them or their experts.

This is not a partisan issue. This is dealing with 12,000 Ontarians and—

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member raises a very valid concern and has spoken and worked hard on this issue, and I acknowledge his efforts on that, as have a number of our other colleagues in this House. It is a very bad situation.

I've met with them; a number of my officials have, a number of our members. We've examined the proposal. We believe that the reason for the disagreement among the pensioners themselves is that in fact the proposal puts that \$2.5 billion at higher risk. That's why particularly the disabled former Nortel employees, many of whom have not achieved retirement age, are opposed to this. That's why a number of pension actuaries we have consulted with say this is too high-risk a strategy and that in fact it will not enhance the future pension security of Nortel employees. We did put \$250 million into the pension benefits guarantee fund—

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Mr. Minister, 37 of 400 disabled employees support your solution; 37 of 18,000 pensioners support your solution. So let's not misrepresent the support that they have for your plan. This is their money. The \$2.5 billion is their money, not the government's money. We believe that the government owes an obligation to justify their rejection of this plan. Premier, will you set up a select committee of this Legislature or another system of consultation or mediation to review this expert testimony in public so that both sides can reach a reasonable conclusion?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The \$2.5 billion does remain their money. The member knows that and he's well aware of that. This FSM buyout model has been looked at and experimented with in other places. Let me just share with the member a quote: "In sum, non-insured pension buyouts are now viewed with suspicion by nearly all stakeholder groups in the UK today. Even the buyout providers themselves acknowledge that non-insured buyouts are not viable in the short to medium term. According to one buyout provider, 'Insurance is the answer; not trying to do some dodgy deal.' Another buyout provider said, 'This is a failed business model.'" This is from leading experts in the UK who have looked at this model.

What we are intent on doing is ensuring that the vast majority of Nortel pensioners continue to receive a substantial—indeed, close to 90% of their pension income.

1130

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. The Minister of Community and Social Services prom-

ised to consult "partners in the poverty community" before replacing the special diet allowance. The Minister of Health never made such a promise, and in fact, groups like 25 in 5 have never been consulted. Will the Premier confirm that the government will listen to the views of groups like 25 in 5 and, more importantly, to low-income people who rely on the allowance before making drastic cuts to the program?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much for this question. It's a very important question. As you know, this ministry is always in consultation with people in the poverty sector to help us make the right decisions. It's not an easy process. It's not an easy decision, as you know, but this government wanted to make sure that we are doing the right thing. That's why we have at the table these experts on poverty, and we will continue to consult them.

I have moved forward with this consultation to review the poverty area and especially the welfare benefits and ODSP benefits that this government is providing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: When this government was consulting last year, 25 in 5 were the experts. Now they won't be consulted at all.

The McGuinty government says that it is committing to building a healthy Ontario. The reality is that the McGuinty government is quietly planning to take millions of dollars out of the pockets of thousands of poor and vulnerable people with diabetes, health conditions, heart conditions, HIV and hypertension, taking away their last hope of staying remotely healthy by reducing the amount of money they have for healthy food.

My question: Why won't the Premier or his ministers stand up for the poor and those with health challenges and provide a guarantee that no one receiving the allowance today will be left worse off than they are now?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a great question, but no, I cannot stand up today and say that those who are receiving special diet today will be receiving it in the future. Along with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the ministry responsible for poverty, we are all working together to make sure that those who are in need of special diet will receive it, but not everyone who is receiving it today will receive it.

We have a report from the Auditor General that this program is unsustainable. We started in 2003 with a \$6-million expenditure on that. It is now \$240 million and it's growing. This program is unsustainable. We are reviewing it and we will come up with another program that I hope will be sustainable.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Minister, broadband Internet access is viewed today as essential infrastructure for both our social and economic

well-being. While urban residents have had access to powerful broadband connections for years, many residents in our most remote and rural communities have not realized the same benefit. Given the importance of being connected in today's day and age, access to broadband infrastructure should be available to as many Ontarians as possible. Building broadband connectivity for Ontario's rural families and businesses opens up new economic opportunity, investment attraction and citizen engagement in rural Ontario. In the great riding of Peterborough, local municipalities are looking to attract new businesses, but often barriers, including access to fast Internet connections, stand in the way of companies deciding to locate in our area. Can the minister let this House know about the steps the government has taken to ensure access to broadband infrastructure?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: The McGuinty government is committed to investing in broadband infrastructure. We know that broadband conductivity investment will bring more industry to rural regions and it will create jobs that will help our rural communities prosper.

Our government continues to address gaps in Ontario through strategic investments, and one of the investments I want to speak to specifically is the investment in eastern Ontario, \$55 million that was funded through a regional broadband proposal from the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus. Last month, we announced that the rural broadband network—they're ready to begin construction.

To put it in context, this large-scale broadband project is a major achievement in eastern Ontario. It will service an estimated one million—

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know the warden of Peterborough county, J. Murray Jones, wants to thank the minister.

My constituents will be pleased to know that our government is working to provide them with further opportunities to connect socially and commercially. The ability to connect through broadband infrastructure will allow for the continued success and prosperity of rural Ontario.

Funding for the eastern Ontario broadband project is just one of the many investments made by this government to create more opportunities for rural Ontarians to take a leading role in Ontario's new economy. Minister, can you please tell this House about some of the other programs available to support and assist rural Ontario?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for the question, and I can tell you, I will enthusiastically respond. A strong rural Ontario makes the whole province stronger. We get that. But I want to speak to the accomplishments to date: 282 rural economic development projects, a \$103-million investment—that's generating over \$771 million in investments; 280 COMRIF projects—that represents a \$298-million investment, generating an additional \$90 million in investments; and 28,000 students in rural Ontario found summer jobs through our rural summer jobs program.

We get it on this side of the House. A stronger rural Ontario makes the whole province prosper, and we have demonstrated that—

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

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier. Back in 2007, the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government signed the Flow agreement on the future of transportation in Ontario. As part of that agreement, Premier, you promised that the province would extend the 407 all the way through to Highway 35/115 by 2013. In fact, in December 2007, David Caplan restated the province's promise—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I remind that we refer to members. The clock has stopped, but I just remind you again.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much.

Now your government has broken its promise by telling us the extension will only be completed to Simcoe Street in Oshawa, and only by 2015. We're going to get half the highway and it's going to take two years longer.

This is a matter of trust. Will the Premier be a man of his word and reaffirm his commitment to the completion of Highway 407 the entire distance, to 35/115, by 2013?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On behalf of the government, I will certainly reaffirm our commitment to completing the highway to 35/115. I think in this time of economic downturn it's remarkable that we're able to go ahead and do this first stage.

The member opposite knows perfectly well that the first part of the 407 was built in stages. We are building the second part of the 407. We're going to take it out, this first piece. We know it needs to go to Highway 35/115. The environmental assessment has been completed all that way. Properties are being purchased as we speak. We will get there, but we've got to do it right and we've got to get the first stage done.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: The full agreement was an investment not just in the 407, but in a transportation strategy that included the Spadina subway to Vaughan, as well as the York train system. The federal member, Colin Carrie, recently told Durham region media that unless the Premier makes good on his promise, some of his federal colleagues will be calling for the suspension of the Flow funding from the federal side of the agreement.

Our federal government has been able to keep their word on the Flow agreement. Why can't the Premier keep his word? Is the Premier willing to throw away millions of dollars out of the federal government by not keeping his word?

I'll put the question to the Premier one time: Will the Premier simply keep his word on this promise?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are going ahead with all of the projects that were part of the Flow agreement: the Highway 404 extension, the Highway 7 widening, the

Highway 407 extension to Highway 35/115—all of those are going ahead.

I think it's absolutely consistent with this party's position that it would threaten—and that's what it is—threaten to stop, threaten to cut, threaten to pull back. What we're doing is, we're moving ahead. We've made the commitment to Highway 35/115, getting the 407 out that far. We've done the environmental assessment. We're going to do the first stage.

As I said, I think it is a testament to our commitment to transportation in this province and to infrastructure that in this time of economic downturn, even when projects are very costly, we are going ahead. We've made that commitment. We're going to get going on the first stage of the 407.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Brad Duguid: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to correct something that I may have said regarding one of my responses. I think I said there are 8,000 smart meters installed; there are actually 4.1 million smart meters installed. There are 8,000 meters which are on time-of-use pricing. I just wanted to correct that to be sure.

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

The House recessed from 1141 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to recognize some executive directors of Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada who are here on the front lawns today. Please welcome Mr. Ron Olsen, an actuary; Mike Moorcroft, who's the chair of GTA membership; and Ray Hounsell, who's the Quebec chair.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I also want to introduce the national chair of the Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada, Don Sproule, who lives in the great riding of Ottawa Centre—welcome, Don—and also Frank Mills, who is a director of NRPC Canada.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: This afternoon, I want to continue with my standing up in support of seniors. I want to bring up a very important issue that is constantly coming up in my riding of Durham. That is the issue of the lack of alternatives for seniors who are in the hospital. In the hospitals they call it ALC, alternate level of care.

Mr. Speaker, you would know, as most members should know, that now under Premier McGuinty's government,

they're charging people to stay in the hospital when they've been determined as being alternate level of care. They're handing the—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Algoma should pay attention because they are handing people bills of up to \$1,000 a day. These are our senior citizens, in many cases veterans.

The reason for that is they're allowed to put five preferred long-term-care homes. Now, these homes, by the way, could be way out of the community, and the care providers would have a long drive to visit and support these individuals.

The point I'm trying to make is that they have not, to any extent, built any long-term-care homes. Another sign—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: That's not true.

Mr. John O'Toole: You'll have a chance to speak.

Another sign is that they have also started to regulate retirement homes. Retirement homes don't have one nickel of provincial money in them. They are ignoring the seniors of Ontario, and I'm standing up to make sure that the members on the government side who wish to make a point stand up—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is with great pleasure that I stand in the Legislature today and commend members of the Oakville community for the celebration they organized this summer to mark the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy.

In particular, I would like to recognize Oakville resident Lieutenant Glenn Woolfrey, who put together the local celebration and presented a framed display of the HMCS Oakville to teach us a little bit about a not-well-known part of our town's history.

Since 1910, more than 300 Canadian Navy ships have been named for communities across Canada, and that includes the HMCS Oakville. In August 1942 during the Second World War, the HMCS Oakville had its defining moment as it captured an enemy submarine and its crew after the submarine had attacked a convoy between Cuba and Haiti. The destruction of the U-boat and the capture of its crew was cause for celebration across the country, particularly in Oakville where 2,000 people came out to celebrate from a total town population at the time of only 4,000.

Once again, I would like to thank Lieutenant Woolfrey and those involved, including TOWARF, the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps of Oakville, Scouts Oakville, Burloak Legion and T.A. Blakelock High School for their efforts to celebrate the Royal Canadian Navy's centennial and for keeping our town's history alive and vibrant.

GORD HUNTER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to say thank you to Ottawa city councillor Gord Hunter for 30 years of public service.

I've worked with Councillor Hunter for a decade, first as a young staffer at Ottawa city hall and now the MPP for Nepean–Carleton. On many occasions I've called upon him for advice on planning matters and community issues. I know I can always count on getting the straight goods from Councillor Hunter.

At city hall, he's known for his common sense and frankness around the council table when it comes to tax dollars. These qualities have served him well, as well as our constituents, over the years.

Councillor Hunter was a teacher at Confederation high school when he entered politics. He first represented Nepean, then the regional municipality of Ottawa–Carleton. He then handily won three terms at the new city of Ottawa. He was also the standard-bearer for the Liberal Party in Nepean–Carleton on a few occasions.

But city hall needed him, and Councillor Hunter has championed many of the projects that have helped Nepean become one of the greatest communities in the city of Ottawa, a place where families love to work, play and live. His legacy includes community institutions like the Nepean Sportsplex, Andrew Haydon Park, Ben Franklin Park, the new city of Nepean town hall and bike lanes on all arterial roads in Ottawa.

He's an avid sportsman, and I felt privileged and honoured to bestow upon him the 2010 Nepean–Carleton sports builder award.

I've always respected and admired Councillor Hunter. I will miss working with him, but in his retirement, I want him to know I will continue to call on him for advice from time to time.

On behalf of this Legislature, the people of Knoxdale–Merivale and the people in Nepean–Carleton and the city of Ottawa, I want to say thank you, Gord Hunter, for all you've done for our community.

SHANE WAKEFORD

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rise today not only as the member for Timmins–James Bay to give somebody a congratulations for a job well done—but to my son-in-law who ran the Ironman in Louisville, Kentucky and finished the Ironman coming in 630th out of 3,000 people.

Applause.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say I find it absolutely amazing that anybody would want to run the Ironman in the first place—when you look at me. But I'm extremely proud, both as the father-in-law, but also as a provincial member of Parliament representing the riding of Timmins–James Bay.

He has worked really hard in order to train for this particular event. He has been doing biking, running, swimming and five-hour marathon runs, and has to do it

hours at a time. He has been doing all this stuff for the better part of a year and for him to go down to Louisville and to do us proud—Canada, Ontario and the city of Timmins. I say to my son-in-law, “Mr. Wakeford, job well done; we're very proud of you.”

As the Legislature of Ontario, we congratulate you on the well-deserved applause that we have just given you when it comes to this pretty amazing thing. On behalf of all of the Legislature, congratulations.

EASTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Last week, I had the pleasure of participating in an eastern Ontario development fund announcement in my riding.

1510

Through the EODF, our government is helping 417 Bus Line, a bus provider based in Casselman, to expand their operation to include a full-service maintenance and training facility. Also, 417 Bus Line will invest a total of \$4.9 million to construct a new building with environmental upgrades, provide training in marketing and engineering to staff, hire 10 new mechanics and apprentices, and expand their coach bus service in eastern Ontario and western Quebec. As well, 417 Bus Line will retain 100 jobs with this project. The province is providing over \$139,000 through the EODF to support the company's investment.

Working with local business organizations is a key component of the Open Ontario plan. To date, the EODF has announced over \$24 million to 52 projects that have created 735 new jobs. As a result of this province's comprehensive tax package, the tax on business investment in Ontario is being cut in half, making Ontario businesses more competitive.

Quel plaisir de représenter les gens de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

BUILDING PERMITS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: On July 1, we were hit with the HST, an additional tax on a wide range of goods and services. One such service is home renovations. Building permits are generally required for renovations that involve a change to the structure of your home. It is the homeowner's legal responsibility to get all required permits. If you hire a contractor, you can make arrangements for the contractor to do this for you. Your contract should specify what permits are required and who is responsible for obtaining them. Regrettably, a fallout of the HST is that many renovation jobs have been pushed to the underground economy to avoid paying the HST. If these illegitimate operators are working for cash to avoid the HST, they are presumably avoiding other legal requirements, and this puts homeowners at risk.

If you carry out a home renovation project without a building permit, your municipality can issue a stop-work order, you may have to redo your project or you could be forced to re-renoate or restore your home to its original

condition. In the event of you selling your home, the buyer's due diligence will reveal the unpermitted renovations, and this will complicate the sale until this is resolved.

Don't be tempted to forgo a building permit. Protect yourself and ensure that your renovations are done according to the building code.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak about an event I had the pleasure to attend yesterday, and that was the reopening of the Victoria Park subway station and its renovations. This event occurred yesterday. Bus terminals and other parts of the subway station were improved. Among the improvements were a new six-bay bus terminal, better station access with widened entrances, new sidewalks, a ramp, elevators and more. The provincial gas tax funding has helped make these improvements to the Victoria Park subway station possible.

Since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested more than \$10.8 billion in public transit across Ontario. That includes \$3.7 billion to the city of Toronto to improve and expand transit. These investments have led to increased transit ridership of nearly 110 million passenger trips across the province, have encouraged carpooling to occur, have reduced congestion and have also improved air quality in this province.

Ontario's gas program was introduced in 2004 and, to date, more than \$1.6 billion has been given to Ontario municipalities for public transit improvement. The McGuinty government has committed more than \$848 million in gas tax funding to the city of Toronto, and I am pleased that a portion of this was able to go to the riding of Scarborough Southwest.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Bob Delaney: Ontario is innovating again, this time to enhance learning among our preschool children. Full-day kindergarten, which began across the province last week, is the latest of many initiatives to help our province's families and ensure that the next generation of Ontarians reach their full potential and succeed in life in the 21st century. This investment in our future will further sharpen Ontario's existing competitive advantage. According to the Centre for Spatial Economics, full-day learning will provide a greater economic benefit in the long term than its investment costs in the short term.

Some 35,000 Ontario four- and five-year-old students in almost 600 schools began full-day learning this month. In years to come, full-day learning will expand across Ontario. This means more working opportunities for stay-at-home parents. It means more children getting a head start in life and learning in a safe school system.

Hard-working Ontario families know that full-day kindergarten equips our young children for greater success in life. These kids will have the 21st-century skills Ontario needs to compete in the global economy.

The experts agree, and the rest of the world is coming to Ontario to see what our province does right in full-day kindergarten for our kids.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This past weekend, educators from several countries around the world came to Ontario to attend an education summit. Since 2003, over 437 international delegations involving over 4,000 visitors have come to Ontario to learn about Ontario's education reforms and successes.

Education is an important part of this government's Open Ontario plan. Our government has made significant investments to strengthen Ontario's education system. Test scores are up, class sizes are down and more and more students are graduating.

This summit coincides with a very exciting time in the history of Ontario as this government launches full-day kindergarten in almost 600 schools across the province, which will provide our children with a strong foundation and help them reach their full potential.

Next fall, Ontarians will have a clear choice to make: to support a government that will move forward with improvements to education, or go back to the failed policies of the past that have failed our children, our parents and our teachers.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 111(b).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Delaney presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Bob Delaney: No, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 111(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NARCOTICS SAFETY AND AWARENESS ACT, 2010 LOI DE 2010 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ET LA SENSIBILISATION EN MATIÈRE DE STUPÉFIANTS

Ms. Matthews moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to provide for monitoring the prescribing and dispensing of certain controlled

substances / Projet de loi 101, Loi prévoyant la surveillance des activités liées à la prescription et à la préparation de certaines substances désignées.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the minister wish to make a short statement?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Introduction of bills? The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I move that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled World Water Day Act, 2010, and that it now be read for the first time.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, we need some more information.

ARTHUR WISHART AMENDMENT ACT (FRANCHISE DISCLOSURE), 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI ARTHUR WISHART SUR LA DIVULGATION RELATIVE AUX FRANCHISES

Ms. Jaczek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to amend the Arthur Wishart Act (Franchise Disclosure), 2000 / Projet de loi 102, Loi modifiant la Loi Arthur Wishart de 2000 sur la divulgation relative aux franchises.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I do. This bill, which is co-sponsored by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and the member for Parkdale–High Park, amends the Arthur Wishart Act (Franchise Disclosure), 2000, to require a franchisor to provide a prospective franchisee with an educational document containing specified information. Before entering into the agreement, the prospective franchisee is required to provide the franchisor with a signed, written acknowledgement that the franchisee has examined the educational document.

BIG BAY RESORT ASSOCIATION ACT, 2010

Ms. Munro moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr38, An Act respecting Big Bay Resort Association.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There is no statement after that.

JACK JOHNSON

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak in remembrance of the late John McLellan “Jack” Johnson.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I want to rise and say a few words today in the Legislature in regard to Jack Johnson.

First elected to this place in 1975, Mr. Johnson, from what I know from reading in preparation for this statement, was a person who had served in the local level of government for some years. He was known as a pretty honest, hard-working kind of guy, but what he was known for was as a guy with a big heart.

He was one of those rare individual politicians who happen to come along and understand that at the end of the day it's not just about serving your constituents but sometimes being civil to each other. In this place, if you've been here around question period, you will see that sometimes we forget that as a lesson.

One of the things I saw as I was preparing was that he was one of those fellows who wore his heart on his sleeve to a certain extent. The politics he brought to this Legislature were those of a hard-working MPP but somebody who also basically took things from the perspective of knowing that at the end of the day we're all human beings. We all come here with our own reasons, but at the end of the day we need to respect each other. I think that's something that not only served him well but something I think we can all learn from.

He is one of those rare individuals who, yes, came here on a bit of a sweep with Conservatives at one point, when the Conservatives were in power for so many years at the time. But when the sweep went the other way, and as the tide went down, his boat was still floating, as we say. He remained in the Legislature beyond the time of the Conservatives being in government. When the fortunes were not so good for the Conservative Party, Mr. Johnson was able to hold on to his seat and remain in this Legislature for some 15 years.

One of the reasons was, as I read it—and I understand this, because it's something like—I don't want to say I'm anything like him or he was anything like me; that's not my point. He understood that politics was local. What he was trying to do was get people to remember that decisions made here at Queen's Park sometimes aren't necessarily the right decisions for people back home. He always tried to bring some way of being able to make the point that we needed to get decisions to be more in line with what was happening back home. He was known as a bit of a crusader when it came to that particular brand of politics, of making sure we don't get caught up in the

machinations of what happens in cabinet, the machinations of what happens in a caucus or even what happens in the Legislature, but that we understand in the end that what we need is to have decisions that reflect the values of where we come from and protect those interests of the people we represent. That is something I understand quite well and probably one of the reasons that served him very well as well.

The other thing is that he was a Conservative in the way that—we expect Conservatives to be friendly to business and see that as an important issue, but he was from the perspective of small business. He understood the family farm and those people who work hard in our communities, running individual businesses. The moms and pops, as we know them today and as we knew them back then, are the people who truly are the sort of unsung heroes of the economy, and they need to have champions in this Legislature. I understand that well, because Mr. Johnson was right: These people work hard, they're honest, they do everything they can to succeed, and whatever little money they make in their ventures, either on the family farm or in their local businesses, is money that's spun back into the local economy. He was known as a champion for those individuals because he understood, as others probably do, that at the end of the day the big guys got the bucks, they got the lawyers, they got the consultants. They have all the stuff they need to survive. What people need at the family farm level, and what people need in small business, is some champions not only in this Legislature but outside, to be able to make sure their issues are heard and that at the end of the day they're able to also have an impact when it comes to public policy. That's something he believed in very, very much.

He was a family man, and unfortunately, in that time of politics it was different. We didn't have the constituency offices that we have today; we didn't have the type of support that we have as members. He had to do a lot of the work himself and with his wife, Marnie, who has passed away, be able to represent the work that he did here at Queen's Park back into the constituency. It meant that it took a certain toll on his family. We all know, as members of the Legislature, that although it's a really great calling to get involved in public office, for those of us who are lucky enough to be elected once and then re-elected a number of times, it's going to take a toll on the family. Certainly that was the case with Mr. Johnson, because he had a number of children who saw him from afar at times and would rather have had him come to their events that they had back home and to be part of the decisions and the experience that it is to have a family. Mr. Johnson, unfortunately, at times had to be away because of the way the Legislative calendar was back then, away from his family with less of an ability to get back home, as much as he would want to. We have here in the gallery—oh, my God, all of you are here, the entire family. The entire community is here for Mr. Johnson.

1530

I just want to say, on behalf of New Democrats and Madam Andrea Horwath, the leader of the New Demo-

cratic Party, we'd like to welcome Reverend Colin Johnson, who is here—if you would stand?—along with his other son, Paul Johnson; the daughter, Sheri Johnson; and their extended family. They're here in order to celebrate with us his time in the Legislature.

We say to you, as members of this assembly: Thank you for having lent us your father, your friend, your community friend and member. We thank you for the time he was here, we salute the work that he has done, and we salute you. Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm deeply honoured to be able to pay tribute to Jack Johnson.

When you're doing so, the research people always provide you with information on all the different committees he happened to sit on, when he was elected and when he wasn't. Well, to me, with Jack Johnson, that's—I won't say it's irrelevant, but it's much more personal with Jack because he and I were extremely good friends in the House.

He brought a different demeanour to politics that I think we could all emulate with some satisfaction, and we'd be viewed by the general public in a different way were we to follow Jack Johnson's manner in which he carried out his responsibilities as a member of provincial Parliament. He reminds me a bit of another person from southwestern Ontario, if I can call that southwestern Ontario appropriately, and that's Hugh Edighoffer, because both of them were haberdashers. Both of them owned menswear shops in the communities from which they came and both, again, were very popular with members of the House. If you sat on a committee with Jack Johnson, you sat on the committee with a friend, and you had a lot of chats, not just about the material that was before the committee but a lot of other things.

Jack was, indeed, a strong Conservative. To say that he was a red Tory or another kind of Tory—Jack was a Progressive Conservative. He was very loyal to his party, but he always understood the viewpoints of others in the House, whether they were from the left, centre or right, and he respected very much his colleagues in the House. He taught one person in this House extremely well, and I'll break the rule the Speaker has set, if you allow me to, to say Ted Arnott is the person—I'm going to break the rule and use his name, the member for Waterloo—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, Wellington—Halton Hills, now. Because Ted Johnson is—Ted Johnson. I almost put it that way. That's how close they are. He actually worked for Jack, as some of you will know, and it's easy to say "Ted Johnson" because they are almost precisely the same. One of the nicest personalities you will find in this House today is Ted Arnott. One of the nicest personalities you would find in the days of Jack Johnson was Jack Johnson himself, of course.

It showed in the family. I've had the opportunity to meet certain members of the family in certain capacities: the president of the Ontario Good Roads Association, and I know there is an archbishop there as well. So the family has gone on, and I know he'd appreciate each and every

one of the children, the grandchildren and perhaps the great-grandchildren, brothers and sisters and so on.

They can be justifiably proud, because Jack was the ultimate constituency person. He was an individual who saw no problem as being too small a problem for his constituents to bring that problem to Queen's Park: directly to Premier Davis at the time if he felt it was necessary, but certainly to the committees of the Legislature, to the House as a whole and to individual colleagues who were members of the cabinet at the time.

People write different columns about the demeanour in politics. We've seen this federally and provincially, and we see it in the United States. Jack came from an era where there was much more collegiality that took place within partisan politics than is the case today. That's something we can't roll back, but it is something we can look back upon with a good deal of envy. But it comes from the personality of the individual. It comes from the upbringing of the individual. The family has been involved, as Jack was, and not just in politics, because he was involved in politics at the local level and then at the provincial level. By the way, he never decided to go to the national level because all of us in this House know that the provincial level of government—the provincial representatives—are much closer to the day-to-day challenges, problems and opportunities that people have than the people who serve at the federal level. I'm not being disrespectful of them, but I think we recognize this in this House.

It was with much regret that I learned of his passing. I know that my friend who's in the riding where Jack resided knocked on his door during the campaign and was greeted very nicely. Even though he was a Liberal, he was greeted nicely and given much advice by Jack Johnson on that occasion. He was not afraid to give his advice on many issues.

I want to thank the family for sharing Jack with us for so many years in this Legislature. Ontario is a better place because he was in this House, his constituency is a better place and politics has a better name because Jack Johnson was part of that political scene.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Jack Johnson once told me that during his time at Queen's Park he often wondered whether he deserved to be here. While Jack may have had his personal doubts, which were really just an extension of his characteristic modesty and decency, his constituents had no doubts whatsoever about the man who voiced their hopes and views in this place from 1975 to 1990. In fact, his constituents loved him.

It was hard not to love Jack Johnson, for his heart was as big as it was good. Jack's spirit left this earth about 15 months ago, but today we remember Jack Johnson, the elected public servant who served his people well.

He was a public servant, yes, but also a tireless and hard-working politician. In fact, he liked to tell a story about one of his election campaigns when he attended a record 16 events in one day in his huge, sprawling riding of Wellington-Dufferin-Peel. Unfortunately, in order to make those 16 events, he also received three speeding

tickets that same day—no doubt, another personal best, one that he was somewhat less likely to mention.

I consider myself very, very fortunate to have had the chance to work with Jack, first as a volunteer in his last two election campaigns, in 1985 and 1987, and later as his assistant, working in his constituency office from 1987 until he retired three years later. Those years working with Jack were formative ones that I'll never, ever forget.

Warren Buffett recently wrote in tribute to his late friend and mentor Benjamin Graham, "More than any other man except my father, he influenced my life." I could easily say the same of Jack, but in my case it's perhaps an understatement. He was very much my mentor, a real political hero for the man that he was and the way he approached his responsibilities. He was as good of a friend as I've ever had.

Just as the Great Depression was beginning to tighten its grip in 1930, John McLellan Johnson was born in Detroit, Michigan, where his father had found work. But before long, the young family had moved back home to Mount Forest, where Jack and his twin brother, Dan, grew up. After high school, Jack studied business at Ryerson in Toronto. Upon graduation, he founded Johnson's Menswear, which became a fixture on Main Street of Mount Forest for the next 30 years.

In 1951, he married the love his life, Marnie Johnston. They were very much partners in business as well as life, working side by side as their business grew and prospered. Marnie supported him in every way. They were inseparable. In every sense, they were a team.

Through the early years of their marriage, there were likely many ups and downs, but they were blessed with three children: Colin, Paul and Sheri. The growing family moved to their beautiful 19th-century Victorian home on Queen Street in Mount Forest.

Always an outgoing optimist, Jack firmly believed that you needed to get involved in your community to make it better. Leadership on the local school board, in his church, the chamber of commerce and the Lions Club were all integral to Jack's civic participation as he fulfilled this obligation to his community.

That obligation, however, brought Jack and Marnie a great deal of personal satisfaction. In fact, they both loved it. Always interested in government and politics, he was elected to town council, later becoming mayor of Mount Forest, and he focused his efforts on industrial development and growth. Through his leadership, numerous manufacturing businesses were enticed to set up operations in Mount Forest, creating literally hundreds of jobs in town.

Then, upon the retirement of long-time and well-respected MPP John Root in 1975, Jack was persuaded to seek the PC nomination in Wellington-Dufferin-Peel to succeed him.

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Regional government was, as Jack saw it, the major issue in that election. In fact, the basis of his campaign was to oppose his own party, which at the time was

promoting the extension of regional government. Jack stood fast by his beliefs, refusing to accept the party line on regional government, and demonstrated the courage and conviction that became his hallmark in the communities he served in the Legislature through 15 years as an MPP.

In this place, what goes around comes around, as we know. Jack respected everyone in this House, and in return was liked and respected by members of all three parties.

He once told me that when he was first elected as an MPP, he considered himself to be relatively right-wing. But as we all know, these kinds of labels have their limitations. His views evolved to include strong support for a minimum wage that workers could live on. He supported training and help for those in poverty, and better services for seniors, the disabled and veterans, among other priorities. He came to believe and proudly asserted that he was a fiscal conservative with a social conscience.

That social conscience led to him to one of his proudest accomplishments when he pushed the government to retrofit multi-storey seniors' residences with elevators—elevators that he thought should have been included in the original design of the buildings. Jack was appalled when he learned that a constituent in Hillsburgh who had fallen and broken her hip couldn't return home to her seniors' apartment to recuperate because she lived on the second floor of a building that had no elevator. Jack raised the issue repeatedly and persistently in the House, motivated not by the desire to gain political credit but only to convince the government to get the elevators installed and fix the problem. Finally, after much advocacy, the government listened and set aside the money to meet this need. Not surprisingly, Jack didn't take public credit for himself, but instead took private satisfaction that his efforts made a big difference. That was Jack Johnson.

He also believed in the concept of local autonomy, as he called it. The province, he believed, must respect local councils as mature governments in their own right. He always fought hard to help the local governments in his riding, rightly reasoning if he could help a council he would be helping an entire community.

Within our caucus, he was the longest-serving chair of caucus in memory, serving in this capacity for nine years straight. He disliked having to cut off his more long-winded colleagues, but he did so when necessary, as a good chair must, to keep the agenda flowing. He served on many legislative committees and enjoyed that aspect of the job very much, especially during the minority government of 1977 to 1981. This was, he told me, the most meaningful Legislature in which he had served. In those years, he remarked, people worked together across party lines, when there was a degree of personal respect demonstrated across the aisle in the House and consensus ruled instead of confrontation. Imagine that.

In retirement after 1990, Jack was appointed to the Canada Pension Plan appeal board and later the Alcohol

and Gaming Commission. On another occasion he was appointed to a committee to help displaced workers who were laid off after a large plant closure in Mount Forest.

He was always in demand as an informal political consultant, which meant that almost every aspiring politician in our area, including John Wilkinson, would want to go to seek his advice, which he offered generously to all comers, irrespective of their political stripe. I benefited from that advice through the years too, and to this day when I'm working with my staff, I often preface my instructions with, "Jack Johnson would have done it this way."

He always told me to be my own man, not beholden or defined by my party leader. "Party leaders come and go," he would say. "Never make election promises you can't keep. Promise only your best efforts if re-elected." Good advice for all of us. "Don't get too excited when you receive a call from party headquarters during an election campaign. If you ignore them, they usually go away." And, "Every member should take a weekend off a month to spend with his or her family," more good advice that I haven't always been able to follow.

Today, we are joined in the House by some of the Johnson family, some of his former staff, as well as some of Jack's and Marnie's closest friends. We all miss them both and think of them often. As we gather today to celebrate and give thanks for Jack's outstanding service, we resolve to ensure that the timeless values of integrity, commitment, family and community—all the things he believed in and all things he represented—will be carried on by the service we can render to others in his memory.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills would like a word.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As Jack was a very, very close friend of mine during my period in the 1980s and the 1970s, I just wanted to say to his family—thank you to his friends. I see Bill Moody, his former campaign manager, up there. Jack and Bill gave me a call at 1 o'clock in the morning after the 1987 election, when there were 16 PC members re-elected, Jack being one and me being one. They were celebrating at that point in time, very much, and wanted me to be part of it.

I can never forget Premier Davis coming into caucus down the hall here when we were in the government in the early 1980s and saying that there were two members of caucus who served their constituents better than any of the other members of the caucus, and they were Jack Johnson and Ron McNeil from Elgin. He based that upon the numbers of correspondence, the letters that these two members had written to him and to ministers, and the degree of interest they had in their constituents.

I must say, too, just because of his character, and because of the way he conducted himself when I was serving as a minister in Mr. Davis's government, when Jack asked you to do something he would always preface it and say, "Norm, if you can't do anything, I fully understand. But can you really try for this? Because this constituent was really in need." I have to say to every-

body in this Legislature that when somebody comes to you and asks you like that and has the character and the integrity that Jack Johnson did, it's very difficult for a minister to say no. He was so successful because of his genuine interest in his constituency. Marnie, his wife, was a tremendous partner, and she was a dear friend of mine as well. I miss them both very much.

Lastly, I'd like to say to all members of the Legislature that I have never seen a more cohesive pair than Jack Johnson and Ted Arnott. I thought it was strange that Jim called Ted "Ted Johnson." The way Ted has cared for Jack in retirement and Jack cared for Ted—it was like father and son in terms of their relationship. Ted, I want to thank you for your care for my good friend and our good friend. I know that all the people up there know of your close association and the help you gave Jack when he retired from this place because he missed it so much. Ted, you did a great job for Jack, and Jack did a great job for you. I know you both loved each other. I will miss him every day that I think about him and I keep talking about him.

Thank you very much to his friends and family. He was a great man for all of us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you to all members. I will ensure that the family receives a copy of the DVD and today's Hansard.

Motions?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I think it's ministerial statements, isn't it?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, I've got things in hand. You may not think so, from time to time.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Ramal assumes ballot item number 36 and Mr. Crozier assumes ballot item number 46.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to speak to new legislation that, if passed, would save lives and protect individuals and families from the harmful effects of the misuse of prescription narcotics and controlled substances. At the same time, our proposed legislation's goal is to restore the balance between ensuring access to appropriate pain treatment for patients who need it while preventing misuse, abuse and addiction.

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This legislation responds to one of the recommendations of the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, so ably chaired by Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn.

I'd like to start today by thanking members of the Narcotics Advisory Panel who are in the gallery today. Your advice has been instrumental in the development of this strategy.

Thank you to Diane McArthur, our ADM and executive officer of the Ontario public drug programs; Anne Resnick from the Ontario College of Pharmacists; Tina Perlman from the Ontario College of Pharmacists; Mario Di Tommaso from the Toronto Police Service's drug squad; and Angela Mailis-Gagnon from Toronto Western Hospital.

I would like to say thank you to Pamela McDonald, my senior policy adviser, who has been so instrumental in this work. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Helen Stevenson, the former executive officer of the Ontario drug program.

I would also like to welcome other leaders who are here today to support this legislation: Dr. Michael Gardner from the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, Dr. Janet Kasperski from the Ontario College of Family Physicians, Dr. Peter Selby from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Linda Sibley from Addiction Services of Thames Valley, Donna Bain from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Dennis Darby from the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, Linda Samek from the Ontario Dental Association, Louise Verity from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, and Chief Florence Phillips and Saka Pembleton from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. I would also like to welcome Dr. Rick Glazier.

Thank you all for joining us today.

I'm here today to talk about a crisis that is affecting families all over Ontario. It's a crisis we have to act on, and we have to act now.

Let me start by telling you a very real story. Toronto doctor Rick Glazier lost his son last year to an unintentional narcotic overdose. Daniel was only 18 years old. As a mother, I cannot imagine what Dr. Glazier and his family continue to deal with. I've been told that Daniel got caught up in the abuse of narcotics and was able to access endless amounts of these powerful medications on the street. What struck me about Daniel Glazier's story is that his father, Dr. Glazier, is someone who can prescribe narcotics. He's a family physician.

On the one hand, Dr. Glazier can point to how important access to these drugs is for patients in need of pain management. On the other hand, he understands how important it is that patients, prescribers and dispensers better understand the dangers associated with these drugs and that those responsible for the wide availability of these drugs for illicit purposes are identified and dealt with appropriately.

Dr. Glazier is here in the gallery with us today. Dr. Glazier, I want to personally express my deepest con-

dolences for the loss of your son, and I want to thank you for having the courage to come forward with your story. My hope is that, through your voice, we can raise even more awareness about this very serious issue.

What Dr. Glazier has experienced first-hand is happening to families province-wide. The facts are staggering. We know that since 2004 the number of deaths related to the narcotic group oxycodone has nearly doubled. We know that Canada has one of the highest rates of narcotic use in the world and that Ontario has a much higher rate of narcotic use than anywhere else in the country. Narcotics-abuse-related admissions to treatment and addictions services in Ontario have doubled since 2004.

The problem was made very clear to me when I went on a ride-along with Sergeant Lorna Bruce from London Police Service. It was on this ride-along that we met a drug-addicted woman who was working as a sex trade worker to pay for her habit. I was deeply impacted when I learned that only a few short years ago, this woman was a soccer mom. She was driving a minivan and she was building her own local business. Her life changed quickly. After an injury, she was put on prescription narcotics to deal with the pain. One thing led to another, and the soccer mom found herself addicted. She lost everything, including her kids. She turned to prostitution.

This is just one of the many stories I have heard about the damaging effects of narcotics. I've heard pleas from the chiefs of our First Nation communities, telling us that they have declared states of emergency in their communities because of the devastation of this problem. I've heard from pharmacists, terrified after having been robbed at knifepoint. I've heard from the police, who report that there's been an increase in crime related to prescription drug abuse. I know that many of you have also heard these tragic stories. It's a grim picture and it's a very real picture. We need to curb the abuse so that people who need pain relief get it, but in the right doses and for the right length of time.

The abuse of prescription narcotics, painkillers, has emerged as a public health and safety issue in jurisdictions around the world. These drugs are being over-prescribed, they are being overused and, in some cases, being obtained illegally and sold on the street for profit. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. That's why our government is taking strong action to save lives and improve health outcomes for Ontarians by curbing abuse, addiction and diversion of narcotics while ensuring that patients who need pain treatment get it.

I am proposing legislation that, if passed, would allow the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to collect, analyze and disclose personal health information that relates to all prescription narcotics and controlled substances dispensed to anyone in Ontario. Right now, the ministry does not have the authority relating to claims information for recipients outside the Ontario drug benefit program. There is absolutely nothing stopping people now from visiting multiple pharmacies or doctors over and over again to gain access to drugs. This has

resulted in unrestrained and excessive quantities of prescription narcotics and controlled substances being prescribed and dispensed with minimal oversight.

An electronic database would enable the ministry to collect, monitor and analyze information related to prescription narcotics and other controlled substances, it would identify patterns of inappropriate or excessive prescribing or dispensing, and it would implement a province-wide system of alerts when attempts to visit multiple prescribers or visit multiple pharmacies are detected. In instances of inappropriate use, responses would range from educational support and resources, reporting to the appropriate regulatory colleges and, in extreme circumstances, law enforcement. The database would build greater accountability for health care professionals and, most importantly, protect our patients.

We've worked with the Information and Privacy Commissioner and incorporated her advice into this legislation. I very much look forward to any future advice she may provide.

This strategy is about more than just a database. As part of our broader narcotics strategy, we will also raise public awareness about safety, including youth education, and incorporate more narcotic and pain management education into the medical school curriculum. We're also working with a group of experts to develop recommendations for ways we can move forward with better treatments for addictions.

People are dying. Parents like Dr. Glazier are burying their children. Children are losing their parents. As a government, we have to act. We have to act now. This legislation is essential and I ask all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Responses?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to respond to the minister's statement with respect to the Narcotics Safety and Awareness Act on behalf of the PC caucus.

Let me say at the outset that the issue of prescription drug abuse in Ontario is urgent and growing rapidly. There's no question that it needs to be addressed, so I do commend the minister on taking action to bring forward potential solutions. I haven't had the opportunity to review the bill in detail as yet, but I do understand that there has been extensive consultation with experts on the Narcotics Advisory Panel, so I do thank you for your assistance in preparing this legislation, for your advice and for your considerable attention to this matter. It is greatly appreciated.

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As the minister indicated, not only does Canada rank among the top countries in the world regarding the use of prescription narcotics, statistics show that Ontario has the worst rate of prescription drug addiction in the country. This epidemic has spread to the streets and to our children.

One 2006 study found indications that non-medical use of prescription opioids is increasingly replacing heroin use. Experts say that those who are able to obtain prescriptions often will provide them to traffickers or sell

them themselves for their own profit. One tablet of OxyContin can cost a patient between \$1 and \$4. In return, this can be resold on the market for \$45 or \$50, and we certainly heard in the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions that in some of the First Nations communities, particularly in the north, one tablet can sell for several hundred dollars. So you can only begin to understand the extent of the problem.

In 2009 the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health reported that 18% of students from grades seven to 12 had used prescription opioids for non-medical reasons in the past year. This made prescription opioids the third-most abused drug by high school students, behind cannabis and alcohol. So there's no question that we need to take action now. As the minister reported, this issue was noted by the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, which recently released its report under the able chairmanship of the member from Oakville. I was also privileged to serve as a member.

One of our recommendations was for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately address the problem of addiction to prescription painkillers. This is very immediate, and I am grateful for that.

But we also certainly urge the minister to not only adopt but to implement the other 22 recommendations of the final report of the mental health and addictions committee, one of which is the lack of addiction recovery services in Ontario. I do understand that there is an addiction treatment component to this legislation but I would urge the minister to consider adopting the report of the select committee. This would address the concern regarding a lack of addiction treatment programs in the province, while also supporting a more comprehensive mental health system. As we know, there is a direct correlation in many instances between people suffering from significant mental health problems who are also addicted to, among other things, prescription painkillers.

Having said all of this, I do have one big concern, and that is not with respect to the legislation itself but rather the implementation of the legislation, including the construction of a database which will track the doctors, pharmacists and patients who are involved in the consumption of these medications. It does disturb me—as it does, indeed, the rest of the PC caucus—that we need to invest another \$1 million in this strategy, not because the people who are addicted to these medications don't deserve this or because we shouldn't identify the source of the problem. Rather, it's the fact that because of the incredible bungling of the eHealth fiasco, we have to spend another million dollars—and I suspect it will be a lot more than that—in order to provide this band-aid solution before we can get a comprehensive ehealth system up and running. So it is particularly concerning to me, given the urgency of the problem. My question to the minister would be, how long is it going to take to get this up and running? We really need this to happen now, and frankly, this government doesn't have a really good track record in this respect.

I do hope that it can be quickly implemented.

I do also have a concern quickly that I would like to just mention: the fact that there is also a need to balance this policy with a chronic pain strategy. I hope that that's something that the minister will consider as part of the overall strategy with respect to this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

Mr. Howard Hampton: This proposed legislation is long overdue. Addiction to things like OxyContin and Percocet is a problem that has been growing at a serious rate for some time in the province. So it is, as I say, long overdue that there be some response from the government.

The response that is part of this legislation is, as I read it, for the most part focused on monitoring and education, and those are good things. You have to monitor the degree to which these kinds of drugs are being prescribed and over-prescribed or improperly prescribed, and you have to work with pharmacists, physicians, mental health agencies and patients in the area of education. Those things are good and fine, but there are two other aspects to this issue which need to be addressed as well.

I am told that in my part of the province, someone who finally recognizes that they are addicted to Percocet or OxyContin will wait more than six months just to have a chance at accessing treatment. Note what I said: They will wait more than six months just to have a chance at treatment. At the end of six months, they may be told, "Sorry, the treatment facility is filled. There's nothing we can do for you." But just to have a chance at treatment, they will wait more than six months.

Chiefs of First Nations in my constituency tell me that what happens then works something like this: That period when someone realizes they've got an addiction and they need to do something with it and they're told, "Well, come back and see us in six months," often results in an even more serious addiction. When people are told, "You can't get help. Sorry, there's no help now. You have to come back and see us in six months and we might be able to help you," people then go right back into the addiction. You have to be able to address people's needs when they recognize their need, and if you cannot address the need then, the problem becomes even more serious.

The legislation is very skimpy, and the government's public relations production here is very skimpy on treatment. Treatment has to happen, otherwise we have a crisis on our hands that we have not even begun to understand.

Let me give you an example from some of the First Nation communities in my constituency. The addiction rate in some of those constituencies is 30% or 40% of the people or higher—30% or 40%. So in a community with a population of 1,000, 300 or 400 people in the community are addicted to Percocet and OxyContin. The kind of scenario that we heard of women selling themselves on the street to pay for their addiction happens all too often.

This brings me to another part of this: There has to be a legal response. Chiefs of First Nations have been

asking this government for emergency powers to set up the kind of search and seizure at just two airports, the Sioux Lookout Airport and the Red Lake Airport, to interdict the supply of drugs coming in. Let me say this: If this were Toronto and we had 400,000 people addicted to OxyContin and Percocet, I think governments would take an emergency response. We would see serious search and seizure at the airport.

But that's not happening amongst many of these First Nations. The airport is the key because many of these communities have no road: 25 of these communities you have to fly into. It seems to me that there needs to be a response from the government on this, because many of the drugs we're talking about are not, in fact, coming from Ontario pharmacists, they're coming from the United States, they're coming from Winnipeg, they're coming from outside the borders of Ontario. So even if you get tough with pharmacists and you do the education and the monitoring, you're not going to interdict the supply of drugs. There must be a legal response from this government as well.

Yes, the Charter of Rights protects people's rights, but when you're dealing with an emergency situation and hundreds of people are dying, it seems to me that calls for a legal response to that emergency crisis.

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PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm glad to present this petition: Stop the Unfair Tax Grab.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:"

"Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

"Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

"Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario's economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a \$2-billion income tax cut;

"Be it resolved that the undersigned call on the Legislature to cancel the scheduled implementation of sales tax harmonization."

I agree with this petition and will affix my name to it. Nick will bring it down.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm tabling about 8,000 signatures on a petition, along with my colleague MPP Charles Sousa, on behalf of Nortel pensioners. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Pension Benefits Act (PBA) regulations for 'loss of sponsor' of defined benefit pension plans only permit windup and annuity purchase; and

"Whereas in the present economic climate the cost of annuities is at a 25-year high with no relief in sight;

"Therefore the purchase of annuities exacerbates the punitive impact of windup on Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, and increases the costs passed on to the taxpayers of Ontario;

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

"To amend the PBA regulations to permit the Administrator and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to apply other options in the 'loss of sponsor' scenario which will provide more benefits to Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, such as the continuation of the pension plan under responsible financial management by a non-government institution."

I affix my signature and send it to the table via page Shanthos.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas almost 12,000 Ontario citizens who have an intellectual disability are on waiting lists for residential supports;

"Whereas another 7,000 individuals are waiting for other supports;

"Whereas 80% of the 1,500 parents providing primary care for their adult children waiting for residential services are over the age of 70;

"Whereas the government of Ontario made a commitment in 2007 to provide a 2% base funding increase to agencies providing developmental services every year up to 2010-11;

"Whereas the government has decided not to provide the 2% funding increase promised for the current year;

"Whereas the failure to honour this funding commitment will cause further deterioration of supports and services for people who have an intellectual disability;

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

"That the government of Ontario reinstate the 2% base funding increase promised four years ago to service providers in the developmental services sector."

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature and give it to page Henry.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition signed by 203 members of the Bearskin Lake First Nation. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we oppose Bill 191, the Far North Act, and call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw it;

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

“Bill 191 violates the treaties and disrespects our jurisdiction. It imposes a massive interconnected, protected area over our homelands without any compensation. It splits our northern First Nations from our southern First Nations.

“Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect our treaties and our inherent jurisdiction. All development and protection decisions within NAN territory require the free, prior and informed consent of NAN First Nations.

“We call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately withdraw Bill 191 and, instead, initiate a respectful government-to-government dialogue with NAN First Nations.”

As I said, this has been signed by 203 members of the Bearskin Lake First Nation, and I affix my signature as well.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have with me a petition that was presented to myself and MPP Yasir Naqvi from Ottawa Centre. It's part of 8,000 signatures provided by Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Pension Benefits Act (PBA) regulations for ‘loss of sponsor’ of defined benefit pension plans only permit windup and annuity purchase; and

“Whereas in the present economic climate the cost of annuities is at a 25-year high with no relief in sight;

“Therefore the purchase of annuities exacerbates the punitive impact of windup on Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, and increases the costs passed on to the taxpayers of Ontario;

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

“To amend the PBA regulations to permit the Administrator and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to apply other options in the ‘loss of sponsor’ scenario which will provide more benefits to Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, such as the continuation of the pension plan under responsible financial management by a non-government institution.”

I affix my signature and provide it to Caelan, the page, to deliver it to the table.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Parliament of Ontario, presented to me by Joanne and Dohn Pelton from RR 1, Innerkip.

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care in its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

“Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until 99 animals had been killed;

“Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen’s Park by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

“That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature should call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring these powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services.”

I affix my signature, as I agree with this petition.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition signed by 197 members of Wapekeka First Nation, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario proposes to pass Bill 191, the Far North Act, it violates the treaties and disrespects our jurisdiction. It is not a true partnership.” It imposes a massive disconnect of economic, social, cultural and traditional ties to our homelands by designated protected areas “over Nishnawbe-Aski ... homelands without any compensation. If Bill 191 passes, we will not recognize it;

“Whereas we, the people of Wapekeka First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, have not yet been consulted and accommodated;

“Whereas we, the people of Wapekeka First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, have not given free, prior and informed consent to Bill 191, all development and protection decisions within Wapekeka First Nation of Nishnawbe-Aski Nation require the free, prior and informed consent of the people;

“Whereas we, the people of Wapekeka First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation will make the final land use decisions, Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect Treaty number 9 and Treaty number 5 and First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction. We will continue to work on local, community-driven land planning initiatives based on our jurisdiction; and

“Whereas we call on all interested parties, including environmental organizations and industry, to withdraw their support for Bill 191;

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

“To oppose third reading of Bill 191, the Far North Act, and call on Ontario to withdraw it;

“To engage in honourable consultation with the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191; and

“To obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191.”

As I said, this has been signed by 197 members of Wapekeka First Nation, and I affix my signature as well.

1620

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada; and

“Whereas real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bio-artificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bio-artificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition signed by thousands of good citizens of Cambridge, which reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Cambridge Memorial Hospital and other hospitals in the Waterloo region are experiencing substantial increased demands due to population growth; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s freeze on new long-term-care facilities has resulted in additional long-term-care patients in our hospitals; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s cuts to hospital funding have resulted in a dangerous environment for patients and staff in Cambridge and across Ontario;

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

“(1) That the McGuinty government meet its obligations to introduce a population-needs-based funding formula for hospitals, as has been done in other Canadian provinces.”

I agree with this petition and affix my name thereto.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition from 45 members of Kasabonika Lake First Nation. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario proposes to pass Bill 191, the Far North Act, it violates the treaties and disrespects our jurisdiction. It is not a true partnership. It imposes a massive, interconnected protected area over Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) homelands without any compensation. If Bill 191 passes, we will not recognize it;

“Whereas we, the people of Kasabonika Lake First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, have not yet been consulted and accommodated;

“Whereas we, the people of Kasabonika Lake First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, have not given free prior and informed consent to Bill 191, all development and protection decisions within NAN territory require the free, prior and informed consent of the people;

“Whereas we, the people of Kasabonika Lake First Nation within Nishnawbe-Aski Nation will make the final land use decisions, Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect Treaty number 9 and Treaty number 5 and First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction. We will continue to work on local, community-driven land planning initiatives based on our jurisdiction; and

“Whereas we call on all interested parties, including environmental organizations and industry, to withdraw their support for Bill 191;

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

“To oppose third reading of Bill 191, the Far North Act, and call on Ontario to withdraw it;

“To engage in honourable consultation with the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191; and

“To obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191.”

As I said, this has been signed by 45 members of Kasabonika Lake First Nation, and I have affixed my signature to it as well.

RECYCLING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I’m pleased to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which has been supplied to me by some students of Lisgar Middle School. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the grade 7H students of Lisgar Middle School believe that the current method of recycling used dry cell batteries and other household hazardous waste materials is not successful. We have attempted to create the easiest and most comprehensive method of recycling batteries and other household hazardous materials.... This initiative fits ... into the same frame of reference as the

blue box recycling and composting programs, which have encouraged individuals and households to recycle as much as they already do. We implore the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to give this proposed initiative of a household red box recycling program your approval...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: ... to support, enthusiastically, the Recycling Raptors of grade 7H at Lisgar Middle School, in their proposal of a household the red box recycling program, and ... to pass into law such a program, as described ... outlining the red box recycling initiative....”

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition on behalf of the students at Lisgar Middle School, and I especially thank Fatima Khaled of Terragar Boulevard and Sandy Beckett of Prairie Circle for signing it. I'll send it down with page Alex.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired, and I am certain we are now at orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPEN FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2010 LOI DE 2010 FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO PROPICE AUX AFFAIRES

Mr. Fonseca, on behalf of Ms. Pupatello, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to promote Ontario as open for business by amending or repealing certain Acts / Projet de loi 68, Loi favorisant un Ontario propice aux affaires en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Today I rise to talk about our Open for Business legislation, in particular how it contributes to fairness and safety in Ontario workplaces.

I'm honoured to stand here today and support the bill introduced by my colleague the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade has led our government's initiative to reach out to businesses and improve communication and co-operation between business and government. Although the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has taken the lead role in this effort, the development of the Open for Business Act has involved numerous ministries. I applaud the efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Consumer Services, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Government Services, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, and the Ministry of Transportation. I am also proud to say that my ministry, the Ministry of Labour, has had a major role in the Open for Business legislation.

The fact that 10 ministries are involved in this legislation shows just how committed our government is

to supporting business. Positive interaction with business is not just a responsibility of one ministry; it involves many. I would say perhaps it involves all ministries in government.

We know that a thriving business community contributes to a prosperous Ontario and good jobs for Ontarians. A thriving business community develops innovative products and solutions that address some of our most pressing issues of the day. A thriving business community contributes to the revenue that allows our government to provide Ontarians with high-quality education and health care. As the economy continues to show signs of recovering, we are continuing our work to make Ontario a great place to invest and to start a business and to expand that business. We're creating an environment that supports new and established businesses while maintaining our high standards to protect the public interest.

As my colleague the member from Mississauga South will speak to shortly on the legislation, the Open for Business Act, if passed, will address long-standing concerns of the business community. It would save businesses both time and money while continuing to provide appropriate government oversight.

1630

The Open for Business initiative aims to create faster, smarter, and more stream-lined services and regulations, and the benefits of these smart services often extend well beyond our business community. Members of the public also want governments to provide faster and more effective services, and I'm proud to say that we have dealt with concerns of both business and workers in schedule 9 of the Open for Business Act, which amends the Employment Standards Act. This proposed legislation, if passed, would make the resolution of employment standards claims both faster and easier for employees and employers.

In recent years, we've received more than 20,000 claims a year. This has meant that some of those claims have taken long to resolve. Employees have waited too long to get money into their hands. Employers have also had to deal with outstanding issues for too long.

Bill 68 would, if passed, result in faster resolution of those employment standards claims. This means getting that money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians faster. We're helping employers get claims off their books sooner. The bill would encourage employees to contact their employer as the first step to filing an employment standards claim. Employees would have to contact their employers, but they wouldn't have to meet their employers face to face. They could write, email or call, and we'll give them the tools to do just that. We're developing a guide and template letter and an online video that walks you through the process step by step to filling out a claim. But if employees feel threatened or face barriers, they can bypass this notification and make a claim directly to the Ministry of Labour.

Experience tells us that many employers want to do the right thing. When employers are notified of a complaint, we find that they want to rectify that situation

as quickly as possible. We know that that isn't possible or appropriate in some cases, and we have taken that into account.

The proposed amendments would allow our officers to take a more active role in helping parties solve their problems. Officers could encourage settlement through discussions, but officers would only get involved if both the employer and the employee agree to that. Settlement discussions would be completely voluntary. The reality is that currently employers and employees can settle claims at any time, and sometimes a settlement is reached sooner if an independent third party can get involved. Sometimes a settlement works better for both sides if an independent third party contributes new ideas and fresh perspectives to dealing with that claim.

The involvement of an officer is another option at the disposal of both parties, and this legislation would also give employment standards officers the power to deal with undue delay in resolving claims. Currently, decisions on claims can be excessively delayed if one side won't provide all the relevant information that is necessary. This proposed legislation, if passed, would allow officers to make decisions based on all the available evidence that they have, that information that has been provided to them within a reasonable time. Officers would also have the flexibility to accommodate parties who may not be providing information for good reason. These proposed reforms build on the work that we've already done to make the claims process as fast and effective as possible.

We've already made great strides in dealing with the large number of claims that we receive. The Ministry of Labour received over 23,000 claims last year; that is a dramatic increase of 40% since 2003. Last year we closed over 21,000 of those claims, of which an increase of 30% came from the previous year. We've improved our claims management system to promote early resolution. We've increased our staff at the provincial claims centre in Sault Ste. Marie. We're bringing the parties together in decision-making meetings to resolve those claims more expeditiously, and we conduct early reviews of all claims. Now almost one third of claims are resolved at the initial investigation stage within an average of 30 days. That's progress.

To strengthen enforcement and improve our claims resolution process, our government has made some great investments: \$6 million over two years in the recent budget. This is an investment in addition to the \$4.5 million we invested in the 2009 budget. And we've done as much as possible within the existing system. Our proposed legislation will now give our employment standards officers the tools that they need to achieve optimum results for both employees and employers.

Our work on the claims process is only one of the measures that my ministry has undertaken to promote fair, safe and healthy workplaces in Ontario. At the Ministry of Labour we've introduced a number of interactive tools that will help both employers and employees. Last year we launched a holiday pay calculator

that helps calculate the amount of holiday pay that somebody is owed. This has gone over with great acclaim. This interactive tool has taken a complex requirement and made it easy for employers to comply and employees to understand what they are owed.

We also recently launched tools for the calculation of termination and severance pay through our website. These tools will make it easier to figure out if an employee is eligible for termination pay or severance pay and to calculate the amounts that are due. We have heard especially from small and medium-sized businesses how important these tools are to them. The owners of these businesses wear many different hats, and if we can help them in any way to allow them to be more efficient and effective and run their businesses in a more productive way, we will.

These tools have received rave reviews from many stakeholders. I know that the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario, from all their members, have heard only positive anecdotal evidence and emails and letters and other information that they've received about how these tools are helping their members.

These online calculators are only one of several tools that we've developed to help employees and employers understand their rights and their obligations.

Open for Business is about helping create an environment that respects employers and employees and recognizes their enormous contributions to our province. I am proud to be part of a government that is working to ensure fairness in the workplace. It's an inherent right of all Ontarians. It's what makes our economy strong and our labour force innovative, productive and competitive. It's what makes our great province stand out above the pack in a changing global economy.

So I stand before this Legislature to ask for all your support, so that all members support this legislation that is going to help the prosperity of our province, help our economy, and in turn allow us to provide those public services that all Ontarians hold so near and dear: great education and health care here in the province of Ontario.

Thank you so much for the opportunity, as we speak here that Ontario is an open-for-business jurisdiction. We want businesses to come and locate here. As a government, we will work with them to grow their business, and that's a good thing for everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to speak on behalf of the official opposition with a few remarks about Bill 68.

The minister in his remarks referred to the fact that one of the objectives of this was to streamline services for people in the province, particularly those people involved in business: with business between each other, business between themselves and government. It certainly raises, in my mind, a very, very important aspect of the question of regulation and the role that it plays in the relationship between government and the many sectors. Obviously I think that there's no one who would quarrel with the importance of providing an appropriate

regulatory framework, and by that I'm thinking in terms of health and safety, people's ability to do business and the products that consumers buy. So regulation obviously is a very important role of government.

1640

It also, besides creating this safety and certainly confidence in consumers, most importantly creates a level playing field for business. Business understands the fact that if everyone they compete with has the same kind of restrictions and regulation and cost, then they can feel confident that their ability to do well in that kind of environment is based on their efficiency, on their customer service, on their ingenuity and things like that. It's not hampered by a regulatory burden.

Unfortunately, there's much in what government provides that people regard as red tape. Red tape means overlap, it means duplication, it means cost and, sometimes to those people who are trying to keep up with an ever-expanding regulatory field, some of these, in fact, are frivolous. There's a tipping point. There's a point where regulations create a level playing field and provide consumer confidence, and then there's the point at which people begin to lose confidence and they see this as costly and repetitive, as well as potentially frivolous. When that tipping point comes, there's an element that eats away at consumer confidence. People aren't sure, when they're doing business with someone, whether they are adhering to the most important parts of the regulatory regime. One of the problems when that begins to happen is that people, feeling the burden of what is now red tape, begin to look for ways they might cut corners. The effect of this, and the most important thing to recall, is the fact that now the only part of the economy that grows is the underground economy.

I think it's important to understand, when the government talks about being open for business, that we need to understand that framework of the difference between regulation and red tape, because in many instances of conversations I have with people trying to do business in this province it would seem that regulation has been overtaken by red tape.

It's very interesting to look at the ideas that are presented to us by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in their document *Prosperity Restricted by Red Tape*. There they are able, through their own research, to tell us that the annual cost of red tape in Canada is an estimated \$30.5 billion. So when the government talks about being open for business, we need to keep in mind some of the problems that come from what appear to be the issues of red tape.

In their January 2010 paper, the Canadian Federation of Business identified the burden of government regulation as a priority for business of 65%, second only to the total tax burden at 75%. What this means is that when they canvassed their membership, the total tax burden issue obviously was the number one issue, with 75% of the respondents identifying it as their first issue, but the regulation of business was a close second at 65%. Certainly, the burden of this was made obvious by presenters at the committee hearings on this bill.

We also heard some of the effects of the government's lack of consultation on the bill. Just as an example, while the minister refers to how important this bill is and the number of ministries that contributed to this omnibus bill, we only had one day of hearings. I think it sort of flies in the face of demonstrating that it's an extremely important bill to the government and to its business relations when we only have one day of hearings and then we also face time allocation. It may have been an important bill for the government, but it certainly wasn't one they were prepared to spend much time on.

It's unfortunate because of the fact that we're looking at many, many stories of people who have experienced red tape. One of the problems about it is that for a small business this is not billable time. So you're looking at virtually making a donation to government by the fact that your time is taken filling out forms and providing information that is required.

As I mentioned, the CFIB did come to the committee, and I think it's important to put on the record some of the comments they made. They indicated: "While this is a step in the right direction, there are obviously a number of pieces that are still missing as part of the government's overall plan to address regulations. As we've discussed before with this committee, there are a number of models that are currently in play in and across Canada where governments have taken steps to address the regulatory burden."

They continue, "If you look at British Columbia, they have a model in place where they counted up all the regulations they had on the books and then they reported on that number on a quarterly basis, just to indicate how big the problem was and in which direction it was headed. Across to the other side of the country, in Nova Scotia, you have a different system at play. What they've done is they've counted up all the number of hours that it takes a business owner to comply with government regulations and they have then set benchmarks to reduce the number of hours that they have to spend filling out government paperwork. That model has actually succeeded, even with the recent change of government in Nova Scotia.

"That's, I think, the first thing that we need to do."

We have more sage advice from Ontario's business leaders that this government is not particularly interested in.

A written submission from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce strongly criticizes Ontario's red tape mess: "The existing regulatory framework is an impediment to sustained economic growth. As the economy has diversified and society has become more complex, the government's responsibilities have increased accordingly.

"Despite periodic cutbacks and downloading, the three orders of government in Canada have undergone a continuous expansion over the past several decades, leading to an accumulation of bureaucracy and intersecting mandates.

"In Ontario, this process has had a negative impact on economic prosperity. Due to an insular focus and lack of

coordination between the various levels and branches of government, Ontario businesses are forced to contend with a regulatory framework which is overly prescriptive, unduly heavy and exceedingly difficult to navigate, all of which impact business' bottom line."

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters identified a concern with the bill:

"While CME is generally supportive, we have a concern with one aspect in particular that does not reflect the Open for Business moniker. The Open for Business Act makes changes to the application of administrative penalties under the Environmental Enforcement Statute Law Amendment Act that are of concern to many manufacturers.

"The proposed wording of Bill 68 would enable penalties to be applied by either a provincial officer or a director. It should only be a director level as defined in the Ministry of the Environment organizational hierarchy.

"This is at a more restrictive, more senior level to ensure a broader oversight. It is also critical that businesses have the ability to appeal to ensure that the principles of natural justice are recognized and upheld."

1650

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has indicated their support for removing compensation in legislation for livestock, poultry and honeybees killed by predators, providing the replacement regulations cover what is needed. They want any regulation to include the following principles: "that the list of predators be expanded beyond current wolves, coyotes and bears; that the list of eligible livestock and poultry be expanded beyond cattle, horses, sheep, goats, swine and poultry; that livestock guard animals—donkeys, dogs and llamas—be treated as livestock; that compensation reflect true market values; that the provincial government reimburse municipalities for their costs in running this program; that the appeal process from the Livestock, Poultry and Honey Bee Protection Act be retained; and that the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs's policy on setting a value for newborn lambs, calves and kids be retained."

These are just a few examples that demonstrate the range of regulatory change that is contemplated in this bill.

One of the other areas is the question of warrantless-search provisions. Again, concerns were raised by the federation, and the question of natural hazards as well as biosecurity on farms were some of the issues that they had raised. So this is a recurring issue throughout the presentations.

Ontario Forest Industries was also critical of the effect that the Endangered Species Act is having on their industry. They said:

"Bill 68 raises more concern than comfort, and while the provisions for expedited approvals are positive, they are far outweighed by the concerns surrounding the proposed changes to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act under schedule 10.

"Quite clearly, the proposed forestry changes in Bill 68 do nothing more than simplify the government's

process for handing out unwarranted and unnecessary permits under the Endangered Species Act.

"Regardless of how Bill 68 simplifies the process, the problem remains—permits under the Endangered Species Act do not work.

"The ESA is a broken piece of legislation, and one of its fundamental flaws is the permitting process."

When we look at just those few examples, it becomes very clear that there is much concern in the community at large about Bill 68. Certainly I'm happy that the government has acknowledged the issue of red tape, I would say for the first time in seven years. But they have not really come to grips with the kinds of day-to-day issues that, frankly, as others have pointed out, are significant deterrents to the kind of economic activity that everyone would agree would be helpful in this province.

I think the fact that small business finds itself without a minister with that specific cabinet post again sends the wrong message of this government and its willingness to take an interest in small business. Many people are discouraged when they look at the kind of regulatory burden; they are actually discouraged from starting a business themselves. I think this is something the government has glossed over in this bill.

In the little time that I have left I would just add one thing: This opposition party, this side of the House, we recognize how important it is. One of the very few promises that has been made by our leader is, in fact, recognizing the importance of red tape and a systematic approach to its reduction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The government calls this the Open for Business Act. I think workers in the province of Ontario would call it the sacrifice-of-workers act. What the government proposes to do here is to take workers who work in some of the most precarious workplaces, workers who are the most vulnerable, workers who cannot find protection anywhere else, workers who do not have the benefit of a union or an association or a federation to fight for them, workers who essentially are on their own—this government proposes to make it more difficult, tougher for those workers to receive the vacation pay, the overtime pay, the regular pay that they're entitled to. Now, I guess this is what McGuinty Liberals refer to as "open for business," but I think of all those workers who work for close to minimum wage, who work under the most precarious of circumstances—in some cases they're working in one job in the morning, another job in the evening and yet another job on the weekend trying to make ends meet. It's their rights that are being sacrificed by this bill, and I want to outline exactly what this bill does.

Schedule 9 of this bill proposes a number of steps that workers must take before being allowed to present a complaint for employment standards violation to the Ministry of Labour. Get this: Workers who, as I said, may be trying to make end meet working in three different jobs, workers who can be dismissed with the snap of

a finger, are now going to be told by this government that before they can bring a complaint to the Ministry of Labour, the workers must inform their employer about employment standards violations and the amount of wages or other entitlements that the employer owes the worker. Only if the employer does not comply with the worker's request, may a worker then file a complaint. Well, get this: You have a worker who has no authority, no power in the workplace, who has to pay the bills; you have an employer who has all the power and authority in the workplace and who knows it; and this government says that from now on the worker who has no authority, no protection, no power in the workplace has to go confront the employer who may be treating them unfairly before that worker can seek the protection of the law.

1700

Let me put it in another context: Somebody is walking down the street and a more powerful, stronger person reaches out and knocks them down. The Liberal government now says, if you change the context a bit, that that person must get up and confront this person who is bigger and stronger than them and ask them—maybe the person is hurt; they must confront this person before they can seek the protection of the law. That is how absurd and unequal this is.

Where did this originate? It originated in the la-la land of the Premier of British Columbia, and I invite people to look at what has happened in British Columbia since this legislation was introduced in that province.

But it goes on—the other steps that workers have to go through before they can seek the protection of the law. For the complaint to be accepted, the worker will be required to indicate in the claim form what information was given to the employer, how it was given, and the response, if any, from the employer. There may be some exceptions for this requirement. There may be some exceptions.

Workers will be required to provide in writing specified information and evidence for their complaint before the claim will be accepted for investigation. Complaints for unpaid wages and employment standards rights will not proceed unless these steps are taken. Once again, there may be some exceptions. “May” is the operative word here. But these are all barriers to workers who are already in a precarious situation, workers who have less power in the workplace than the employer.

As I said, this is already in place in British Columbia. British Columbia introduced this mandatory worker—they call it “mandatory worker self-help,” requiring workers to seek employer compliance prior to being allowed to file an employment standards claim. After introduction of this requirement in 2002, the number of employment standards claims being registered with the Ministry of Labour dropped from over 12,000 a year to between 3,400 and 6,500; an immediate drop of 46%. In 2009, the total of employment standards claims was still 42% lower than they were in 2002, even though the labour force was 15% larger.

Legal clinics and worker advocates in the province of British Columbia who have studied this are very clear. They say it's not that the number of employment standards violations have dropped. It's not that suddenly bad employers have found virtue and found religion. That's not what's happened. What's happened is this: The decline in the number of employment standards complaints filed, they conclude, is largely due to the barriers created by the government. The barriers created by the government have made it much more difficult for workers to file a complaint, and as a result, workers who are being treated unfairly by employers throw up their hands and say, “What's the use?” Tell me what justice is there in that? Is this the Liberal definition of “open for business”? Put the screws to the workers who are in the most precarious position, the workers who have the least protection, and say, “This is good for business in Ontario”?

Those who have looked at this in British Columbia have said, “Look; here's the reality. A requirement to seek compliance for employers effectively requires workers to have access to legal information, accounting information and legal processes that most of us don't have and certainly workers working in the most precarious environments certainly don't have: knowledge about how to apply abstract legal rights to their specific conditions, the ability to gather evidence to prove their case, and the opportunity and facilities to assemble, package and deliver it to former employers.”

Most significantly, this mandatory self-enforcement requires that workers will have the skill set and confidence to confront their employer or former employer about violations. I don't know about Liberal members, but just about every summer I have students come into my constituency offices who have worked for an employer—they may be university students; they may be 17, 18, 19—who say, “Look, I think I'm owed pay. I think I'm owed this, but I don't know anything. What do I do?” Our office has to help them navigate this stuff.

In our part of Ontario there's no employment standards officer at hand; it all has to be done either over the Internet or by telephone. This government assumes everyone has access to the Internet. This government assumes everyone has access to an office that's going to help them. I've got news for you: They don't.

If you look at what this government is doing on the community legal aid front, community legal aid clinics across this province are being either shut down or curtailed. Trying to get a legal aid certificate to get some basic information is becoming more and more and more difficult in community after community in this province. How is somebody supposed to “self-help” themselves if none of these resources are at hand? And that's what they found in British Columbia.

The reality is—and anybody who has worked in employment standards will tell you this—most claims are filed after the employment relationship has broken down. The employer often treats employees very poorly in the process of termination. It's not a matter of saying,

“Who’s at fault here?” Once the employment relationship has broken down in a setting where workers do not have a union, very often they’re very quickly out the door: “Thank you very much. Goodbye. You’re gone.” That’s the reality.

Just imagine that you’re one of those university students or a high school student. You’ve just been told, “You’re out the door; goodbye. Don’t come back to work tomorrow.” How are you supposed to gather the information? Without knowing anything about the rules of evidence, how are you supposed to gather the relevant evidence? How are you supposed to calculate all of the things that you were owed? You don’t have access necessarily to the time sheets. In most places where I worked as a university student, I had my version of the time sheets. The employer often had their version of the time sheets. Let me tell you, it was the employer’s version of the time sheets that mattered—if they kept a time sheet.

What this government proposes to do is to penalize those workers who are the most vulnerable and in the most precarious situations in Ontario’s workplaces. That’s what this government is doing. As I say, the proof of it is in the fact that this legislation has already been adopted in British Columbia. It was adopted in 2002 and the statistical results are there for anybody to see.

The reality is that job loss and income loss are recognized as some of the most significant life changes causing stress for workers and their families. You’re trying to pay the hydro bill. You’re trying to pay the heating bill. You’re trying to pay the rent. You’re trying to put food on the table for your kids. Your employer suddenly says to you, “I don’t need you anymore. You’re gone.” In that kind of stressful situation, the McGuinty Liberals propose that that worker has to go about and do all of these so-called self-help measures before they can even ask for the protection of the law. It’s undeniably unfair and unjust.

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It fails to recognize the substantial structural power imbalances in the workplace between employers and employees where you don’t have a union. For most workers, that imbalance, the fact that you could be fired tomorrow, creates reasonable apprehension and fear. How is someone supposed to challenge an employer when they’re already in that situation of reasonable apprehension and fear? In our view, a mandatory requirement for workers to contact their employer about wages contravenes the whole purpose of the Employment Standards Act: to provide employees, to provide workers, with an administrative process that helps protect their rights.

In my experience—and before I came to this place I did a fair amount of labour law—workers often attempt to obtain their employment standards rights directly from their employer before they file an employment standards claim. In fact, in most cases that’s why the workers are fired. They go to the employer and they say, “Look, I think I’m owed overtime. I think I’m owed vacation pay.

I don’t think you kept an accurate time sheet here,” and that’s when they get fired. This government now says to them, “You have to go back and do it again.” After you’ve been put out the door, after you’ve been intimidated, after you’ve been told you no longer have a paycheque, this Liberal government says that those workers have to go back again and confront the person who has just fired them.

It seems to me that what’s going to happen here is this: You are going to see workers who have been denied their vacation pay, workers who have been denied their regular pay, workers who have been denied their overtime pay, rather than go through the hoops and the hurdles that are going to be created by this government, simply throw up their hands and say, “What’s the use?” That’s exactly what happened in British Columbia; exactly what the studies in British Columbia have shown. And the government will claim victory. The government will say, “Oh, look, we must be doing a wonderful job. The number of complaints that have come to the employment standards branch is way down.” Sure, if you put enough barriers, if you put enough doors in place, if you put enough hoops that people have to jump through, yeah, the number of employment standards claims will drop. What a surprise. If you applied the same principle to our health care system, you could dramatically reduce the number of people who go to the doctor’s office. You could dramatically reduce it. You just put enough barriers, enough hoops in place, and people will say, “I can’t do it. I can’t get there from here.”

But that’s not justice. It certainly isn’t fairness, and it’s certainly going to create even more inequality in this province than we already have—and we already have far, far too much. There are too many people at the low end of the income scale, too many people who are having a hard time paying the bills, and you’re going to see more of it as a result of legislation like this.

What was equally wrong about this legislation is the way that it’s been steamrolled through this Legislature. One would think that with something like this, which intends to fundamentally change the balance of rights as between workers and employers, there would have been some consultation, there would have been actual public hearings. Were there public hearings in Thunder Bay? No. Public hearings in Windsor? No. Public hearings in Kingston? No. In Ottawa? No. In Sudbury? No. In Sault Ste. Marie, in Sarnia, in London?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It was like the social contract: no public hearings.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Oh, I see Liberals promoting Bob Rae again. Good for you, Jim. Good for you. I like to hear that. I like to hear that, Jim.

Interjections.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The reality is, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The reality is that this legislation was limited to one day of hearings, and the gov-

ernment was not prepared to accept any amendments. That's the kind of steamroller that we have here.

Here's the context, though, that stands in the background of some of this. The reality is that only 28% of Ontario workers are unionized, leaving most of the workers in this province in a situation where they will now have to enforce their own minimum employment rights. And as I said, it is workers in the lowest-paid jobs, the most precarious jobs, who are least able to negotiate fair wages and working conditions, who are most in need of accessible, effective and enforced employment standards. They're the people who are most vulnerable. They're the people who get hurt the most.

Some other realities of context: Studies have shown that unpaid wages over time and other violations are not just from a few bad-apple employers. Studies that have been done confirm that we have substantial formal employment standards violations.

In the late 1990s, a federal government labour standards evaluation surveyed employers and found that 25% of employers were in widespread violation of the Canada Labour Code and 50% were in partial violation. These findings were confirmed a decade later by both Statistics Canada and the Workers' Action Centre.

The fact of the matter is that even now, the Employment Standards Act and the employment standards branch are not adequately staffed with resources. While the number of workers covered by the Employment Standards Act has increased by 24% between 1997 and 2007, the funding for the employment standards program has been reduced by 33%.

Even recent minimal increases to the employment standards program in the 2009-10 budget leave the program over 10% below 1997 funding levels. Less than 1% of workplaces are inspected for employment standards violations, so there's little risk of violations being detected. An employer's only real risk of being found in violation of the Employment Standards Act is when an employee—usually a former employee—actually does file a complaint.

Left unchecked, violations of particular rights can become widespread over time. For example, violations of overtime and hours-of-work standards cut a wide swath across many industries and sectors. With one in 10 Canadian employees working unpaid overtime, one management-side law firm estimated that this represents more than \$22.5 billion in unpaid overtime and overtime premium pay. Imagine that: \$22.5 billion in unpaid overtime and unpaid overtime premium pay. That is the reality now.

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The majority of resources for enforcing employment standards still go to investigating individual complaints of employer violations. It was noted in 2005 that the practice of dealing with compliance one case at a time is expensive and risks overloading the available system. We have seen an increase in claims over the last five years from an average of 15,000 claims per year to over 20,000 claims per year. By this year, 2010, a backlog of worker

complaints against employers for unpaid wages has grown to 10,000. Today, some workers are waiting more than a year to have the Ministry of Labour begin investigation of their complaints of unpaid wages and entitlements. It's in this context that this government intends to make it even more difficult for the most vulnerable workers to get the pay—the vacation pay, the overtime pay and the regular pay—that they are entitled to.

Now, what is interesting is one of the things the government wants to boast about is that there will be the opportunity for some conciliation, but what we think that means is that the way it has been set up—we think that what has been set up is something which in fact will result in workers maybe getting something, but not getting what they're entitled to; that after workers have jumped through all the hoops and the barriers and been allowed to put forward a complaint, then they're going to be told, "Well, we want you to go through this so-called conciliation process." We think the result of that will be, once again, workers might get something, but they'll get less than what they're entitled to. How is that justice? How is that fairness?

The government may call this the Open for Business Act, but we think it's pretty clear, when you look at what is going to happen to the employment standards program and the employment standards branch and what happened in British Columbia, that what this really should be entitled is the worker sacrifice law—not the Open for Business law, the worker sacrifice law. Because if it's anything like British Columbia, you're going to see the most vulnerable workers—the workers who are most in need of protection of their rights are going to be denied. And as they have in British Columbia, those workers will simply, after trying to get through the hoops and barriers, throw up their hands and give up on the process.

Let's be clear: That is a denial of justice; that is a denial of fairness. That is not an advancement of process in Ontario; that is not an advancement of justice or fairness in Ontario. It is very clearly a denial and it's the most vulnerable workers, the lowest-paid workers, the workers working in the most precarious situations, who are going to make the sacrifice. That's why New Democrats cannot support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to discuss the third reading debate for Bill 65, the Open for Business Act.

Since the McGuinty government came into office in 2003, we have demonstrated a commitment to working with business and to address barriers to investment and growth. Our balanced approach to strengthening the economy has lowered business costs while we've continued to invest in things that matter most to Ontarians: health, education, poverty reduction and the environment, all of which gives Ontario a competitive advantage.

As the economy continues to recover from the sharpest economic decline since the 1930s, we are continuing

to work to make Ontario the best place to start and grow a business. The Open Ontario plan, introduced as part of our 2010 provincial budget, is designed to open the province to new ideas and new investment. Bill 68, the Open for Business Act, supports our economic plan.

Make no mistake, in order to compete in the global economy, Ontario must be open for business. In order to secure the next generation of jobs for Ontario families, Ontario must be open for business. And in order to help Ontario small businesses to achieve their full potential, Ontario must be open for business.

As a former business owner and a former banker to business, I appreciate first-hand the challenges imposed on small and medium-sized enterprises and their activities. When I arrived at Queen's Park, the message was given to me loud and clear by members of the Small Business Agency of Ontario. That message was: In order for business to increase its competitiveness and improve its efficiencies, it requires governments to be more sensitive and responsive.

I am proud to be part of a government that not only listens, but has acted to implement sweeping changes that will enable greater opportunity for Ontario businesses. We call this change the Open for Business Act, and this is just one part of our Open Ontario initiative.

Three words sum up the more than 100 amendments from 10 ministries within the Open for Business Act: simpler, better, faster. Working with all ministries, Open for Business has three key areas of focus. One, modern government: We want a streamlined and focused regulatory environment that delivers results for business while protecting the public interest. Two, modern services: Our goal is to deliver better products and services, including service standards and guarantees that support the needs of businesses. And three, a new relationship with business: We want a working relationship between business and government that is open and responsive.

Throughout the Open for Business initiative, the government has consulted widely, seeking the best advice from business, industry, environmental and labour organizations. On August 3, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs heard from 16 such stakeholder and advocacy groups. Let's look at what some of the representatives had to say.

Ian Howcroft, vice-president of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Ontario, told the committee that "we are encouraged by this initiative and we think it goes a long way to help reduce the process cost and the regulatory cost, which will allow businesses to focus on what they can do to help the economy continue to grow and hopefully to thrive."

Kim Allen, the CEO and registrar of Professional Engineers Ontario, said, "In summary, Professional Engineers Ontario believes that the proposed changes to the Professional Engineers Act, as set out in schedule 2 of Bill 68, if enacted, will open up engineering and harmonize requirements, making them good for the public, good for business, and good for the profession."

The August committee hearings were just part of an ongoing dialogue between our government and the

business community on this bill. Throughout and through this dialogue we've learned that it isn't just big business that is supportive; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has also praised the McGuinty government's efforts.

Satinder Chera, CFIB's Ontario director, had this to say when we introduced the bill: "For too long, governments at all levels have been oblivious to the negative consequences of too much regulation on the job-creating small business sector.... Today's announcement is another sign that Ontario is getting the message."

As a government, we recognize the importance of reducing the administrative burden on the small business community, and Bill 68 will deliver significant cost and time savings that will help entrepreneurs and small business owners focus their efforts on growing their business and creating jobs for Ontario families.

Environmental groups have also been part of the consultation process and recognize the importance of moving to a modern risk-based system.

Bob Oliver, executive director of Pollution Probe, had this to say: "Pollution Probe supports Ontario's commitment to build a streamlined modern approval system that is good for business while protecting the environment. The proposed risk-based approach could help achieve this balance. Pollution Probe looks forward to ongoing consultation on this process." He goes on to say, "From organization after organization, this message is clear: Ontario has listened and acted."

Another consultation process is our business sector strategy. We are reaching out to the key industries that drive the economy. In May, we met with BILD, the Building Industry and Land Development Association. We told them to give us their top five priorities, and the ministries responsible would have two months to address those priorities or explain why they cannot be addressed or deliver alternate solutions. We got back to them in June with meaningful proposals which addressed all five of their priorities.

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In August, we met with members of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, including representatives from the five auto assemblers building vehicles in the province, and are in the process of addressing their top five priorities.

This process will continue with more round tables with other sectors, including medical devices, information and communications, technology, hospital, and agriculture and agri-food. Our sector strategy speaks to a key focus of the proposed Open for Business bill: fostering an open and responsive relationship with business.

Bill 68 is evidence that Ontario continues to strive in creating a positive business environment. During our debate, we should keep this in mind. It's so important that Ontario has the best possible environment in which to do business. Companies, both large and small, are the lifeblood of communities across Ontario. Businesses help to pay for our hospitals, schools and infrastructure that support our way of life. Businesses provide the jobs that

our young people aspire to as they work their way through school, university, colleges, and apprenticeship programs.

The proposed Open for Business Act sets out a balanced approach, protecting the public interest and fostering business growth. It's an important undertaking that will ultimately benefit the whole province. With this act we have the opportunity to set in motion some very pragmatic and realizable changes to the way government operates.

Let's look at some of the ways in which the government, by proposing amendments to this act, can save businesses time and money to help them do what they do best. Businesses create jobs and drive our economy.

The Open for Business Act, if passed, would deliver meaningful changes, such as streamlining approvals and modernizing service delivery; harmonizing legislation with federal, provincial and municipal levels of government to lighten the administrative burden on business; delivering faster and easier government-to-business services while continuing to protect the public interest and provide appropriate government oversight; and providing a timely response to business and stakeholder requests in addressing specific issues.

Our balanced approach, together with stakeholder engagement, will bring costs and time savings to the business community and better protect the environment by focusing our efforts on high-risk activities.

The Employment Standards Act has been frequently cited, even here today, as a concern for business, and it is in an area where Bill 68 will provide significant improvement.

Applause.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes, yes.

Among other things, the proposed changes would encourage employees and employers to settle disputes at an early stage, avoiding unnecessary costs for both parties and allowing employment standards officers to focus on the current backlog of claims. By eliminating the claims backlog, the Ministry of Labour can focus on public education and outreach, and conduct more proactive inspections that would reach more workplaces.

Again, we have taken a balanced approach to growing the economy, and the proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act will deliver results for businesses while providing fairness for workers—workers who retain their rights. Their entitlements are not taken away. The employee continues to have options, especially those due to language or disability or fear or intimidation—they still have the right to seek protection.

The amendments to the Highway Traffic Act brought forward by the Ministry of Transportation will also harmonize Ontario's requirements with the rest of the provinces in a range of areas, including harmonizing vehicle width exemption with other provinces, phasing out the need for special permits relating to the length of recreational vehicles, and ensuring Ontario's vehicle length regulations for full trailers meet national obligations.

What will these changes all mean for the business community? Let me quickly explain. By not having to apply for special permits, businesses will reduce their operating costs, and the harmonization of requirements with other provinces will enhance the movement of goods and people. This is good for Ontario's trucking and passenger industries and our economy.

These changes would reduce the regulatory burden on business. It would also meet standards endorsed by the council of Ministers of Transportation in support of the Ontario-Quebec trade and co-operation agreement.

Furthermore, the proposed changes to the Dangerous Goods Transportation Act allows for the timely adoption of federal rules and would reflect the most current safety practices for transporting dangerous goods, a measure that will also reduce the duplication of efforts between the province and the federal government. One set of rules makes it easier for businesses to comply and will continue to keep our roads among the safest in North America.

In addition to reducing the administrative burden on Ontario businesses, Bill 68 also supports a strong workforce. The Ministry of the Attorney General has proposed amendments to the Professional Engineers Act that will align definitions and licence requirements with interprovincial and international expectations and improve self-governance mechanisms. This includes the removal of unnecessary citizenship requirements for individuals who apply for a professional engineer's licence. These amendments have been proposed by the Professional Engineers Ontario council, the governing body of the profession, and will make the administration of the engineering profession in Ontario more efficient.

In addition to responding to specific changes requested from stakeholders, the Open for Business Act will also modernize many pieces of existing legislation. Take, for example, the proposed modification to the Construction Lien Act, also brought forward by the Ministry of the Attorney General. If passed, these would be the first substantive changes to the legislation in 20 years. The proposed changes to the Construction Lien Act would help ensure that courts are only involved in construction disputes when needed, by broadening the definition of the term "improvement."

It would clarify the lien process for condominiums and the right to cross-examine those who have registered liens.

It would protect the rights of claimants with sheltered liens, regardless of whether the original lien has been dealt with or resolved.

The Council of Ontario Construction Associations represents more than 10,000 construction businesses that employ more than 400,000 skilled tradespeople and has come out in support of these proposed amendments.

COCA president Ian Cunningham says the following: "The Open for Business Act is a significant victory for COCA and for Ontario's institutional, commercial, industrial and heavy civil construction industry, especially small businesses.... COCA is very grateful to Attorney

General Bentley and to Economic Development and Trade Minister Papatello for making these changes a priority in the government's mandate."

The Open for Business initiative has already delivered some important results. In September 2009, the Ministry of the Environment eliminated a backlog of about 1,700 applications for environmental certificates of approval. In October 2009, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade launched an enhanced and updated Ontario business program guide, an online tool that provides links to almost 70 government programs and services for businesses across the province.

Ontario has modernized its regulatory policy. As of Nov 1, 2009, ministries must post all proposed regulations that affect Ontario businesses on the regulatory registry website, helping businesses to learn about regulatory proposals, provide input and plan for future requirements.

As part of the regulatory policy, we've also introduced twice-annual effective dates for regulations. Regulations affecting businesses now come into effect twice a year, on January 1 and July 1, bringing greater predictability and helping businesses to plan ahead. Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement this type of initiative.

ServiceOntario, in collaboration with Industry Canada, launched a new business info line for business information about federal, provincial and municipal government services. The toll-free line uses a computerized interactive voice response system to connect callers to 12 high-demand, business-related government programs. Agents can also connect callers to an additional 70 programs covering more than 160 telephone numbers and hundreds of services to businesses.

Through the single business number initiative, Ontario businesses will be able to use their federal CRA business number for dealing with the provincial Ministries of the Environment, Revenue and Labour, with other ministries and agencies to be included later.

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Open for Business is leading an initiative to improve the quality of government service standards and guarantees for business so that businesses know what to expect when interacting with government.

As you can see, the Open for Business initiative has already delivered significant improvements for the business community. If passed, the proposed Open for Business Act, Bill 68, would continue that momentum.

How would we do this? It would make interfacing with the Ontario government (1) simpler, (2) better and (3) faster, for both large and small businesses in Ontario. It would enact changes to our three key areas of focus that I described. Once again, they are (1) modern government, (2) modern services and (3) a new relationship with businesses.

All of the ministries that brought forward amendments to be included in the Open for Business Act have taken great care to ensure that these changes will continue to protect consumers, workers and the environment. By

creating a more focused regulatory environment and providing clearer rules, we will ensure stronger and more rigorous compliance while improving the relationship between government and business.

The days of government and business acting in isolation are over. This legislation was brought forward in recognition that success in the global economy depends on the public and private sectors working together to address barriers to investment and growth.

The Open for Business Act, Bill 68, if passed, would deliver significant changes that will save Ontario businesses both time and money.

Let me say it again: We will continue to protect the public interest and provide appropriate government while removing unnecessary barriers to business. Securing our place as a leader in the global economy depends on Ontario being open for business. In order to secure the next generation of jobs for Ontario families, Ontario must be open for business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 68, the Open for Business Act, 2010, which was introduced by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and which has been so very, very capably addressed by our critic, Julia Munro. Certainly she has done an outstanding job now throughout the debate on this bill in identifying some issues that are obviously of concern not only to us but to the people who have contacted us in the business community and expressed concern. So I want to congratulate my colleague on the outstanding job she has done.

I think one of the things that stands out here is the fact that this bill is about red tape reduction. We're really happy that it is about red tape reduction because it's something that certainly our caucus, under our leader, Tim Hudak, has stressed repeatedly, and that is the need to take a look at the very burdensome red tape that business is finding to be there and asking that the government come up with positive proposals to do so. We are seeing some action on that front and we're certainly pleased about that.

I would just remind the members of this House that the last Progressive Conservative government also identified this as being a huge problem and a burden, costing businesses a tremendous amount of money, billions of dollars annually.

Business people today are unfortunately spending an increasing amount of their time filling out paperwork instead of being able to focus on growing their businesses or having the resources or the ability to hire more employees. We continue to face today, as we did in the past when we were in office, outdated or unnecessary regulations which sometimes can frustrate the creativity of entrepreneurs and innovators who, instead, should be trying to focus on creating new products and new jobs.

I would just mention to this House that this was an exercise that we went through ourselves, and it was a very successful exercise. We eliminated much un-

necessary and outdated regulation. I believe it was a fact that we revoked over 2,100 unnecessary regulations. We oversaw the development and passage of 15 different red tape reduction bills between 1997 and 2003.

I took a look at some of the bizarre regulations that we dealt with. For example, prior to us taking a look at this issue, a projectionist at a movie theatre was required to go through 800 hours of training while it only takes 600 hours of training to become a helicopter pilot. Another bizarre regulation that was on the books before we dealt with it was the fact that bus drivers, who are required to carry an axe on board in case of emergencies, were forbidden to carry this axe across the US border because it was deemed a dangerous weapon. Apparently, they were hiding their axes along the road near the border and picking them up when they came back. So you can see that sometimes we don't do what is necessary, and that is, get rid of some of the outdated and very bizarre regulations.

This bill addresses that particular issue; we're glad that it does. We know that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been highlighting over many, many years the devastating effects of red tape on small businesses, and they did it again in January of this year. In fact, they released a report, as part of their first-ever Red Tape Awareness Week, which was entitled Prosperity Restricted by Red Tape, revealing that the annual cost associated with red tape in Canada totals an annual \$30.5 billion. They also identified the burden of government regulation as being a priority that needed to be addressed for businesses; there were 65% of people who said this was a priority for them. In fact, it was only second as a priority to the other burden that they were encountering, and that is the overall tax burden, which stands at 75%. We know that that burden is increasing for businesses when we take a look at electricity/energy prices, which are increasing; when we take a look at the HST, which is adding to the tax burden for these people. And of course, they have the health tax. This is an important issue—red tape—second only to the total tax burden.

The CFIB stated in 2007 that they were disappointed because the government hadn't been in a position where they were addressing this issue and seemed to be unaware of the size of the regulatory workload or the regulatory cost that government was imposing on small business. The CFIB said that additional regulation unfortunately comes out from all levels of government, whether it's the municipal, the provincial or the federal government. We need to make sure that we keep that in mind, because it's challenging enough today, in the economic environment we find ourselves in, for companies to be able to grow their business and hire new employees and remain competitive in a world economy.

So it's good that we're getting rid of red tape, and some of my colleagues this afternoon have referred to some of the specific examples where the red tape is being eliminated. Hopefully, the government will continue to evaluate, as we did over an eight-year period, the need to

continually revisit the red tape and regulatory workload. Hopefully, they'll also take a look at reducing the tax burden, not just on small business but also on families who are finding it difficult these days to make ends meet as they have encountered the additional cost of HST, electricity, auto insurance, health taxes and the eco tax, which will be coming back. People have less and less to spend each day on discretionary spending.

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Mr. John Yakabuski: Who passed all those laws?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: This was the Liberal government that has passed all these laws in recent years. The public can't believe how much the Premier has changed. They just don't feel that this is what they thought was going to happen. There seems to be a lack of understanding and appreciation for the burden that people are facing today.

CFIB says that the burden of government regulation now exceeds the small businesses' capacity to cope, and—this is another one—the government's capacity to administer, communicate or enforce. I suspect that all these new taxes that the government is introducing—and the most recent one is the child tax credit. I'm not sure that this government has the capacity to administer, communicate or enforce that, too, because the Premier on a daily basis is telling us, "We've not done a great job of communication," and we know that they aren't able to administer it. So there's a lot of difficulty today when it comes to some of the new initiatives that we're seeing.

Let's take a look at CFIB's report. They had some stark numbers in their 2010 report about government regulation on business owners. They said that 73% reported that it added significant stress to their lives. That's what I have heard from the small business community at home. But I would also to have say to you that I am hearing it now in my constituency office from people who are paying the HST and from people who are seeing their electricity and energy prices soaring. It is stressful.

CFIB also said in their report that 62% of people said that because of red tape and the burden, it's taking time away that they could be spending with their family and their friends; 51% said they spend a significant amount of time on regulation outside of normal working hours. So people are working harder but they're getting less. That's like the burden of the HST and the increased electricity and auto prices. People are working harder and harder, but they're seeing less and less. Some people have said to us that maybe family vacations or trips to Wonderland or to Marineland are things they can no longer do because they don't have the discretionary income.

Some 54% of businesses in this survey said it impeded their ability to compete with larger firms, and 63% said it significantly reduced their business productivity. They report that the cost of regulation, in 2008 in Ontario alone, was almost \$11 billion.

So I think you can see that this government must listen to small business. This bill does go down a path where there are some changes that are going to be made; some

of the red tape is going to be eliminated. But I hope that this is not the end, because certainly, as we look to the future, if this province is to remain competitive in the global economy, this government is going to have to do more than what we're seeing here today.

I'm going to leave the rest of my time to my colleague, who I know wants to address other parts of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Right here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Oh, I thought you were just kind of looking—

Hon. James J. Bradley: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was very interested in debating this particular bill, which is very important to the members of the Ontario Legislature. I wanted to indicate, in speaking to the bill, when we say “open for business,” some of the things that have been done for small business in this province. A lot of people don't realize, because there's a focus, and if you're in opposition naturally you're going to focus on what you think is negative, but because I was in opposition I remember that. I was not—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I must confess, I was not as effusive in the praise of the government of the day I should have been, perhaps, or might have been. But now that I'm in government, I can do that.

We have to talk about tax packages, for instance, when you're talking about small business and how you can help and how you're open for business.

A lot of people might have heard about one tax that the opposition talks about, but what they didn't realize was that a lot was done for small business. Small business creates so many jobs in this province. This is not to denigrate large businesses, which provide jobs for people in this province, but if you calculate it, I think you will find that medium-sized and small businesses have been generating a lot of the jobs that have been created in this province in recent years.

I was pleased to learn that our government, in its previous budget, indicated it was prepared to help small business. There were the capital taxes to be eliminated eventually—

Interjection: Lowered.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Lowered. We've had general tax cuts to the corporate sector and special business concessions have been made. Now, is this because the government wishes to show largesse to that community? Not necessarily. They recognize that it is important, if we're to be able to compete with other jurisdictions, that we provide a tax regime in which our businesses can flourish.

I know that when they canvassed both left-wing and right-wing economists, they said, “What is it that you can do for business to help them in the province?” There

were many things that were put out there. Consistently, they said, “You must revise the tax system.” There were people who I would say were very small-c conservative and strong conservatives on one side, who said, “One thing you have to have is a harmonized sales tax,” and then we had people on the left wing who said, “You know something? The harmonized sales tax is the way you have to go.” Every government probably got to the edge of doing it and didn't do it for political reasons.

This government recognized that there was a change out there. We are going through the toughest recession that this country has seen in a long time, probably since the Great Depression. The world has gone through very tough economic times. So what may have been considered in the past a path that government wouldn't go down was a path that we were advised to go down by people left and right, whether it's the Centre for Policy Alternatives—and I happen to have a subscription to the magazine of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. There were the various agencies: the C.D. Howe Institute, of course, and the Fraser Institute. So you had people left and right who were making recommendations.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Jim Flaherty?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, one of the people who really made the case over and over again—I remember our government being chastised by Jim Flaherty. No, we're not supposed to—I guess we're allowed to say it if they're outside the House, but the federal finance minister, James Flaherty, said that he was very critical of the Ontario government for not harmonizing the tax system in this province, and all of his members in the House of Commons voted for a bill that enabled this to happen. So when I heard some of the people on the other side of the House being critical of that, I kept looking and saying, “How did, perhaps, MP Cheryl Gallant vote on this?”

Mr. Jeff Leal: Dean Del Mastro from Peterborough.

Hon. James J. Bradley: How, perhaps, did MP Dean Del Mastro of Peterborough vote on that legislation? Because you must recognize—as I know you would, Mr. Speaker, through you—that this could not have taken place without the support of the federal government, the Harper government: Prime Minister Harper and his various colleagues in the Conservative caucus federally, who, to a person, if they were in the House, voted for this legislation that enabled the harmonization of the tax system in this province. And a former colleague of many of the people who are here in this House strongly made that recommendation.

But I thought, you know, perhaps when we're trying to have something that's open for business in this province—maybe former Premiers were opposed. And then I was listening to a report where former Premier Michael Harris, who served this province for close to eight years, said he was in favour of the harmonization of the taxation system. He said it's good for business and ultimately good for the province. I thought, there's another credible source who is putting forward a proposal in this case. Then I remembered I sat across from a

distinguished gentleman, the former leader of the Conservative Party in this House, now a talk-show host, John Tory—drive at 5 with John Tory.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's on right now.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I listen to that very often. They asked him and he said, "You know, to be honest, if I want to be honest with people"—and John wanted to be honest with people all the time. He said, "It should be done. The government is doing the right thing."

So as part of the package of opening Ontario for business, there are a number of initiatives that we are taking in this province. A reliable system of electric power in this province: Unfortunately, over the years, and this happens, the government had neglected the power system in this province. That grid had to be upgraded. I know in eastern Ontario I used to hear members say that the grid must be upgraded considerably. They said that you had to refurbish the existing plants that are out there that are nuclear plants that had to be refurbished. They said also, "If you want to have Ontario open for business, perhaps you want to get some new generation." My good friend the member for northern Ontario, when he was in government, cancelled the

Conawapa project, which would have given us relatively cheap power—

Mr. Jeff Leal: From Manitoba.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —from Manitoba. But that was cancelled by the previous NDP government. I believe they didn't do it to be malicious. It was just a mistake that was made in cancelling that particular project. It would have been very good for the province.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: But all of this—because the person sitting in the Chair says, justifiably, "How does this tie in with opening Ontario for business?" Also, he looks at the clock and says that we are reaching very close to 6 o'clock.

I wanted to share a few thoughts with my colleagues on the other side that perhaps they hadn't heard in previous debate.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you for the co-operation.

It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Thursday, September 16, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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