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Monday 26 March 2012

Lundi 26 mars 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 March 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mars 2012

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be here today. I would like to welcome, from the great city of Ottawa and the even greater riding of Nepean–Carleton, Councillor Doug Thompson, a former colleague of former mayor Bob Chiarelli, former city councillor Phil McNeely and former city councillor Madeleine Meilleur, who sits directly across from me. He's here today to support the horse racing industry in Nepean–Carleton.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome some special guests. The parents of the member from Scarborough Southwest—my aunt and uncle—Zia Italia and Zio Tonino Berardinetti are here. Also, all the way from Manfredonia, Italy, visiting Ontario, where they used to reside, are Franco and his beautiful wife, visiting from Manfredonia. I'd like to welcome them.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I wonder if you would help me welcome the Ontario Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada. We're joined here today by president Marlene Pavletic, Betty Colaneri, Shari Guinta, Colleen Randall and, from Kingston, Ontario, or at least from the Kingston area, Anne Madden. I wonder if you would welcome them, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to welcome the family of page Emily Chalmers, from Don Valley West, here today: Anna Stabinski, who is Emily's grandmother; Bernardo Stabinski, Emily's grandfather; and Riley Chalmers, Emily's brother. Welcome.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure today to welcome to our chamber Des Hammill. Des is the father of my right hand, my EA, Ashley Hammill, and he's here all the way from PEI. Welcome.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Today we have Cathy Dueck, who is the manager of landscape programs with the Peterborough Green-Up; Axel Tscherniak, who is the executive director of Peterborough Green-Up; Vern Bastable, who is the urban forest co-ordinator of Peterborough Green-Up. They're here today at Queen's Park for the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'm pleased to introduce representatives from the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coal-

ition here today in the east members' gallery. We have Steven Peck, Janet McKay, Deb Martin-Downs, Paul Ronan, Liat Podolsky and Christopher Holcroft. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to invite members to their reception starting right after question period at 11:30 a.m. in committee room 2.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Amir Khosravani, visiting from Iran.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome a former student of mine from St. Michael's College School, whose uncle was Father Ed Ronan, who taught me. Paul Ronan is here all the way from beautiful Colgan, Ontario, the potato capital of the world.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is with much pleasure that I'd like to introduce our health researcher, Mrs. Miriam Barna, with her mother, Laura Alper, and her grandmother Rose Alper, who is also our ultimate go-to when we have a serious question on health promotion. Rose Alper is the person who has all the answers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PROVINCIAL DEBT

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Last week, you were quoted in a Toronto Sun story saying that Ontario's debt level "isn't that bad." You said it's at an "acceptable level."

Premier, let me put this into perspective for you. It took 23 Premiers 136 years to accumulate our first \$140 billion in debt. You, sir, are going to double that to \$280 billion by next year. So when you say our debt level isn't that bad, do you mean that you're just getting started?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We look forward very much to presenting the budget in this House tomorrow. We'll be speaking to debt issues, deficit issues, funding levels for our schools and our health care. We'll describe in quite some detail where we believe that we can find some savings. We'll talk about some of the projects that we think it's important to continue with and others that we should put on hold. I look forward to doing that in this House.

But it's been said, Speaker, that a budget is more than just an economic statement; it's a statement of our values. The values that inform our budget will be those shared by the people of Ontario. They want us to protect

the gains that we've made in their health care, they want us to protect the gains that we've made in their education, and they want us to build a strong foundation for jobs and growth. That's exactly what our budget will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, our position is one of values, one that says you can only spend within your means, that you can only buy as much government as you can afford and that we need to balance the books in the province of Ontario.

We say that, Speaker, because that's also a jobs plan. One thing we've learned is that higher levels of debts chase jobs out of our province. They chill investment; they chill job creation. The Ontario PC Party wants to see an Ontario that's strong, that's vibrant, that's creating jobs. That means getting spending under control.

So Premier, I'll ask you again. You said Ontario's debt level is not that bad. You said it's an acceptable level. I'll remind you that you've added on more debt than from John Sandfield Macdonald to Premier Ernie Eves combined. Can you tell us today, Premier, are we actually going to be on track to doubling our debt or tripling it under Premier McGuinty?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague a little bit of our record that he might not care to reflect upon. We've eliminated a \$5.6-billion deficit that we inherited, Speaker. We then balanced our budget three times in a row. I'll remind my honourable colleague that we keep exceeding our fiscal targets. I'll remind him of that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's where I want it.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A couple of other important facts that are worthy of our shared recollection: Ontario spends the least in the country on a per capita basis. We also employ the fewest public servants per capita in the country.

There is more work to be done. I share that imperative with my honourable colleague, Speaker, but I think it's important that we do it in the right way.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, this just reinforces my point. When I hear the Premier make his argument that Ontario spends the least of the rest of the provinces, it just shows he doesn't understand the big hole he has dug us into. He doesn't seem to understand that we have a spending problem, not a revenue problem.

I want to say, Speaker, that I was proud to be part of the PC government that brought in five consecutive balanced budgets and had the biggest debt repayment in the history of the province of Ontario. As a result, Ontario had one of the best debt-to-GDP—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I was going to make an attempt to get the other side quiet, but the heckling is happening when I'm trying to get them to be quiet—and on the other side. It goes both ways. Allow the question to be put.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. Again, we had the biggest debt repayment in the history of the province, at \$5 billion.

Premier, let me ask you a very simple, straightforward question—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Tim Hudak:—you approach these issues. Premier, are we in such significant debt because we've spent too much money or because we don't get enough revenue? What do you truly believe?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague says he takes some pride in their government's record with respect to balancing the budget. I again remind him that he left Ontarians a \$5.6-billion hidden deficit. We had to pass a new law that says you can't hide deficits anymore; you've got to be very transparent.

I say to my honourable colleague as well that the approach that they brought was, for example, to cut social assistance rates by 22%. That's not an approach we're prepared to take. We are not prepared to balance the budget on the backs of needy families and the backs of our children. That's not an approach we're prepared to take.

Having said that, I'm very confident our budget will be informed by the right choices, will protect health care, protect education and lay a strong foundation for jobs and growth.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: It continues to concern me that you don't seem to understand that you have a spending problem here in Ontario. Your approach has been to try to get more revenue, and all we've seen in your budget leaks today, quite frankly, Premier, are tax grabs or temporary delays, one-year postponements, gradual phase-ins. Sir, that's not going to cut it when we're heading towards a \$30-billion deficit. We're heading towards tripling the provincial debt.

So, Premier, no more one-offs, no more papering over the problems, no more trying to fill up the cracks and no more blaming the federal government for the problems you've created. Let me ask you directly: Will we actually see across-the-board spending reductions tomorrow instead of just simple postponements and delays of the tough decisions?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I say to my honourable colleague that there will be no reckless, thoughtless, across-the-board cuts, in keeping with the good advice we got from the Drummond commission in that regard.

I say to my honourable colleague he's interested that we pursue, in an aggressive way, cuts to government spending. I'm very interested in seeing the look on my honourable colleague's face and those of his colleagues

when we stop some capital projects. I'll be very interested in getting their reaction at that point in time, Speaker.

We're no longer going to fund horse racing in Ontario. My honourable colleague has a specific problem with that as well. We are going to be selling off some of our office buildings. Again, it would be nice to have the support of my honourable colleague in that regard.

Some capital projects, as I say, will be delayed; others will be stopped. Those are very specific areas where there will be some expenditure savings. I look forward to receiving my honourable colleague's support in all those areas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you're reinforcing my point. All you've announced to date are tax grabs or temporary postponements. You mentioned capital projects: You're going to simply postpone those. You mentioned the child tax benefit: You're just going to simply phase in a spending increase. You're going to have one-time sell-offs of government buildings and then rent them back when, in reality, you need to shrink the footprint. You need to reduce the size and cost of government. That's the way of balancing the books in the province of Ontario.

I'm very concerned here. You don't seem to understand you have a spending problem. You're going to delay capital a little bit, but your operating costs are going to increase. So I understand correctly, Premier, that you will continue to spend on the operating side. You mentioned "reckless" and "thoughtless." It is reckless and thoughtless to run up the debt to continue the operating increases that are mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the advice offered by my honourable colleague, but I think it would be fair to categorize it as rather high-level rhetoric.

Here's a specific, Speaker: We can save \$375 million every year if we put an end to our subsidies for horse racing in Ontario. I am encouraging my honourable colleague to stand with us in that regard so that, together, we can lend continuing support to health care and education. That's a choice, Speaker—and by the way, that means rural health care and rural education.

Education and health care help all our families; horse racing helps a few. We've got to make some choices that benefit all our families in all parts of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Premier, there is a superficial, if not supercilious approach you're taking on a serious issue in the province of Ontario, and that's that we're heading towards a \$30-billion deficit.

Premier, I'll say again: All I've seen from you are revenue grabs, which tell me you think you've got a revenue problem, not a spending problem; or temporary delays, postponements or gradual phase-ins, but you're still taking us over the cliff. When you came into office, our debt-to-GDP ratio was 28%. You've now put it to 38%, and you're heading towards 50%. The reason is, you

spend too much. You spend too much on the operating side.

I'll ask you one last time: Will you reverse course? Will you admit you have an operating spending problem and not a revenue problem here in our great province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague again of two incontrovertible, irrefutable facts. As a government, nobody's spending less on a per capita basis than we are here in Ontario. As a government, nobody employs fewer public servants on a per capita basis than we are here in Ontario. So I think it's important for my honourable colleague to understand that.

I would also say that we're not prepared to do what he has been recommending. We will not cut full-day kindergarten. We will not increase our class sizes. We will not eliminate our 30% tuition grant for the benefit of our middle-income and low-income families. Those are important contributors to a growing strength in the province of Ontario, bringing us into an era where we'll be competitive with the best in the world.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier says that Ontario's deficit has got to get under control, and to get it under control, difficult choices have to be made. But people are troubled by the ones he's already making, and last week, we saw a lot of examples.

Families are worried about tough times that we're facing. Does the Premier really think that the CEO pay raises that we saw last week and privatization are putting the interests of families first?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague. I'm convinced that she and her party will want to support some of the measures that we will continue to support through our budget: full-day kindergarten—they stand in favour of that, I believe; smaller classes—I believe they stand in favour of that; maintaining 20,000 jobs in the education sector—I believe they stand in favour of that; short wait times—I think they support that; transitioning to greater levels of support for home care—I think they support that as well, Speaker; supporting our 200 family health teams that are looking after 2.8 million patients—I think they support that; supporting our movement to ensure that every Ontarian has an electronic health record; we're at 7.5 million Ontarians so far—I believe they support all those measures, Speaker.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, families are looking for concrete action to protect jobs, to improve health care and to make life more affordable, and they're looking to this government for leadership. What signal does it send when they see that public sector CEOs got raises of up to half a million dollars?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would encourage my honourable colleague to stay tuned for the budget and measures that will specifically address the concern that she is raising.

But I'd say beyond that—I say again—the budget is about choices. Our choice, Speaker, is to ensure that we protect the gains that we have made together in our schools and in our health care. At the same time, I want to ensure that we continue to lay an ever stronger foundation for jobs and growth.

So if there's anything that my honourable colleagues may wish to offer by way of support for those kinds of directions, then we are all ears, and we look forward to presenting this budget, as I say, tomorrow, which will embody the right choices that Ontarians want us to make.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the everyday people who make this province work understand that we're in very tough times, but they also know that Ontario won't get better if they continue to fall behind.

The Premier talks about jobs and growth. Over the last week, in communities across Ontario, people learned that they're going to be losing their jobs. On Friday, it was a decision to privatize Ontario Northland.

Can the Premier explain why Ontario can't afford smart investments that create and protect jobs where they're badly needed, but can afford seven-figure salaries in the public sector and scandalous waste like that that happened in Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, I would encourage my honourable colleagues to stay tuned to the budget. I believe that they will find ample reason to support certainly some of the measures found in that budget, in particular those that continue to provide support to families on social assistance.

I can say this: There will be modest increases in those areas of highest priority—health care, education and social services. I've not talked a great deal about that last one publicly, but there will be modest increases in health care, education and social services. Other areas of government expenditure will either be flatlined or they will see decreases in their levels of funding. But again, it's about recognizing that we can't do everything in the way that we always have, Speaker. We've got to make some choices. We've got to attach priorities, and we're saying health care and education and social services will rank first.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The people I meet around this province are worried about their jobs, if they even have one. They haven't seen the 600,000 jobs that the HST and corporate tax giveaways were supposed to bring. Over the last week, the government has announced plans to kill thousands of direct jobs and privatized job-creating infrastructure like Ontario Northland.

We've proposed real measures to create jobs, replacing corporate tax giveaways with tax breaks that are actually linked to job creation and ensuring that natural resources stay here in Ontario to create jobs.

My question, Speaker, is: Will the Premier try some new ideas to actually create jobs, or can we expect more layoffs in tomorrow's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to remind my honourable colleague that since the recession, nobody has created more jobs in Canada than Ontario—over 300,000 jobs. Last year, we created over 120,000 new jobs.

I say to my honourable—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty:—my vociferous honourable colleague on the other side that the facts, in fact, demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of those jobs are full-time jobs, and the overwhelming majority of those jobs pay above the average industrial wage in Ontario. We're creating new jobs that are better jobs.

To demonstrate just how important our educational levels are in that regard, last year we lost 9,000 high school-level jobs, but we created some 119,000 new jobs for people with post-secondary education. Those are good, high-paying jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the fact is, we lost 4,000 full-time jobs last month. I guess the Premier forgot about that one.

Household budgets are under pressure like never before. More and more people are feeling like they're falling behind, and over the last week, the government has made it clear that they plan to demand even more from families.

We have made proposals to make life much more affordable in Ontario, like taking the HST off home heating and reviewing our electricity system to eliminate duplication and restore public ownership and accountability in the electric system.

My question is: Will the Premier try some new ideas to make life more affordable, or will we expect, yet again, to have a more expensive Ontario for everyday families in tomorrow's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll remind my honourable colleague of two important things about full-day kindergarten: One, it saves a family over \$6,000 annually per child in child care costs. Secondly, Speaker, we've just received some new independent information about just how full-day kindergarten is working in Ontario. A comparison between a full-day kindergarten child and a half-day kindergarten child has become very pronounced in terms of the increased abilities in numeracy, literacy and fine motor skills that we're seeing in our children who are in the full-day kindergarten program. So I would ask my honourable colleague to continue to support full-day kindergarten, not only because it gives our families an economic advantage but because it gives all of us a

stronger economic advantage as we build a stronger workforce for the future.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, families know that we can improve our health care system and save money with smart investments. They were happy to see the government follow the New Democrats' lead by introducing birthing centres in Ontario. But I can tell you, they're very sick of seeing hospital CEOs get yet another round of pay hikes while seniors are being cut off of home care in this province. We proposed measures to improve health care, starting with capping outrageous CEO salaries, Speaker, and taking that money and putting it on the front line. Eliminating waits for home care is another idea. Wait-lists for home care are far too long.

My question to the Premier is this: Will the Premier try some new ideas to improve health care, or can we expect more of the same in tomorrow's budget when it comes to health care as well?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think there's a pretty long list of innovations that we've introduced into health care in Ontario, the latest being our birthing centres. I'm pleased to have the support of the opposition. I believe both parties support that particular measure.

There also are family health teams. We had none before; now we have 200. These are teams of doctors and nurse practitioners and nurses and physiotherapists and other health care professionals. Together, around the province, they're caring for 2.8 million Ontario patients. Before, we had none, Speaker. We've also got North America's first nurse-practitioner-led clinics. We're very proud of those as well.

So we're open to new ideas. I just say to my honourable colleagues in the opposition that there will be a number of new ideas, of course, to be found in the budget.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Premier. Ontario is in its deepest decline in memory. Not even Bob Rae's spending managed to sink Ontario to the depths that this government has brought us to over the past eight years.

Liberals always avoid taking responsibility for their runaway spending, just like they did in the last campaign, by hiring themselves an economist to give them some ideas on how to get Ontario out of the mess they've created. That economist gave them a blueprint for what must be done if our province is to emerge from the hole that Liberal spending and mismanagement have created.

To date, the Liberals still haven't figured out that they may actually have to do the job that they were elected to do: govern. That means making the decisions that are right for Ontario instead of profitable for the Liberal Party.

When will this government finally admit that it has no plan, that it has no vision? When will they adopt the recommendations that our party has made to balance—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the question. I want to come back to this issue of choices and values. My honourable colleague took the opportunity yesterday to voice his displeasure regarding our decision not to freeze the Ontario child benefit.

1100

The Ontario child benefit is something we're very proud of on this side of the House. It's a Liberal government innovation. We introduced it in 2007. It was \$250 at the time. It now meets the needs of some one million Ontario children growing up in poverty, providing their parents with about \$100 every month. We've decided that we can't implement the growth in that particular benefit as quickly as we would like, so we're going to take a bit more time to do that.

But again, I would encourage my honourable colleague to rethink the situation. This is something that I think is in keeping with the values that we all share as Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I might say, Speaker, that my displeasure voiced yesterday was with the fact that this Premier, as usual, did not follow the advice of his own economist. For eight years, the McGuinty government has spent Ontario into an almost insurmountable mess: eight years of increasing debt and deficits, eight years of scandals, eight years of avoiding accountability, and the trend continues. The McGuinty government continues to avoid doing the responsible thing and reining in public salaries, and we all know why: They don't want to rock the boat with the unions that support them at campaign time.

Now that the money has run out, now that they've bankrupted Ontario and there's no money left to support their spending addiction, will the McGuinty government finally admit that it is out of steam and out of ideas? Will they implement the recommendations that we put forward repeatedly to balance the budget and get Ontario back to recovery?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's a lot of anger and a lot of pessimism in one guy, Speaker.

I just can't accept that, obviously. Just a few more facts: We've got North America's biggest auto sector. We have the fastest-growing clean energy sector in North America. We have become the mining capital of the world, with incredible opportunities. We had our best year ever last year in mining, Speaker. Our banks—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Good news hurts, Speaker; it hurts.

Our banks are rated the best in the world and our financial services sector is the largest in North America next to New York. Ontario is in the top three in North

America in biotech, information and communication technology, and the film industry, and the list goes on and on, Speaker.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

More than a year ago, the Minister of Health ignored a detailed memo outlining Ornge plans, including the creation of for-profit spin-offs and pay for executives. She also ignored countless whistle-blowers. Then she ignored a draft report by the Auditor General. It seems to me the Minister of Health didn't do her job. Why, Premier, is she keeping it?

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

Hon. John Milloy: As the honourable member is aware, as members are aware, this Wednesday the public accounts committee will have a chance to look into the Ornge situation. Mr. Speaker, they'll be able to learn about the action that has been taken by the Minister of Health. When she found out there was wrongdoing, she took action in terms of dismissing the board and the CEO; in terms of putting forward a new performance agreement; in terms of forensic auditors; and in terms of bringing in the police.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting that the honourable member stands here today and talks about ignoring documentation. We've discovered that the New Democratic Party has failed to provide this Legislature with certain information that on December 15, 2010, the leader of the New Democratic Party as well as the member from Nickel Belt were sent a similar detailed memo from Ornge, outlining the same information.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: What happened at Ornge under this government's watch is staggering. The health minister's latest excuse—that she was too busy during the election to worry about wasted health care dollars—actually points to an even greater level of not doing her job. If regularly ignoring a situation where millions of our health care dollars line the pockets of executives and well-connected insiders does not get a minister fired, what does?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy that the page is right now sending over a copy of this letter, which, as I said, was sent on December 15, 2010. It talks about a \$275-million bond; it talks about the helicopter purchase; it talks about the acquisition of the new headquarters; and it talks about for-profit ventures.

Let me quote page five of the letter, Mr. Speaker: "Ornge is ... free to earn other sources of revenue.... Ornge already earns revenue other than government sources and is engaged in businesses other than the delivery of the Ontario system.... These additional sources of revenue ... are growing."

I ask, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP sat on that information for 15 months, why did they not raise questions in

this House? Why did they not contact the Minister of Health? It's passing strange, the double standard that the member and her party are bringing to this debate in the Legislature.

GOVERNMENT OFFICE SPACE

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Last week, you announced the plan to modernize the way government manages its office space—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Put the question, please.

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, last week you announced the plan to modernize the way government manages its office space, including the sale and lease-back of buildings around the province and a big reduction in the amount of leased space here in Toronto. In the private sector, here in Toronto, maximizing the efficient use of leased or owned real estate has long been under way. Those large organizations that have made space management part of their business strategies have seen real impact on their bottom lines.

Minister, is this just a short-term initiative to raise money over the next year or so, or is this a long-term commitment that's going to have results in perpetuity?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member of Willowdale for this very timely question. The answer is both: Our strategy targets generating \$500 million for Ontarians up front and creating savings of over \$300 million in the long term. This is an approach that is consistent with recommendations of Mr. Drummond and of the provincial Auditor General to dramatically reduce the government's leased space.

In Toronto, for example, the most expensive real estate market in the country, we lease over 100 buildings. Our footprint in the city is 7.8 million square feet, and 4.8 million of that is leased space.

So to the Leader of the Opposition: We're reducing the amount of space we lease in the city of Toronto by one million square feet. That's about the same size as 43 floors of the Toronto-Dominion tower. We are making progress, and we are reducing our footprint.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, I know what prime Toronto real estate goes for these days on a per-square-foot basis. If the government leases a million square feet less—or, as you say, 43 floors in the TD tower—that's tens of millions of dollars, year after year, that's not going out the door in rent. It's simply not sustainable, Minister, for a government to be maintaining an average of 250 square feet of space per employee, when in the private sector they manage quite well with about 180 or 200 square feet.

But Minister, what about those regions outside Toronto, where long-owned government buildings are being sold? Do these sales outside Toronto indicate in any way

a change of the government's commitments to jobs and services in those communities outside Toronto?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to say that the entire strategy offers long-term benefits to Ontario families who want to see resources focused on their priorities: health care and education. Ontarians expect us to make these kinds of smart, thoughtful and efficient choices. This choice generates money in the near term, savings in the long term, and has no negative impact on government services or jobs in those communities. We have the opportunity now to deliver genuine value for money, injecting some private-sector discipline and investment into our real estate portfolio, with savings and efficiencies going into health care and education.

We're looking at about half a billion dollars to be generated on the front end of this strategy, and an additional \$300 million in net savings over the longer term. This is the right approach at the right time.

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AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. I have here two reports issued by the Auditor General. The first one is dated October 2009, and it relates to the eHealth scandal; the second one is the Auditor General's report of this past week relating to the Ornge scandal.

The similarities are striking. In fact, the Auditor General could have used the same template for each of these reports because, in both reports, the Auditor General issues a scathing—scathing—indictment of the Ministry of Health for failing to exercise its oversight over the Ministry of Health.

I want to know from the Premier: Why, in the case of the eHealth scandal, was the former Minister of Health required to step down, and why does he insist on protecting the current Minister of Health?

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this Wednesday the public accounts committee will begin its hearings into the Ornge situation. There'll be an opportunity for members to question the Auditor General—beginning with him—and other witnesses on relevant—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I also think there'll be an opportunity at the committee meeting to discuss what all members of this Legislature knew about the Ornge situation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

I will begin to identify individual members.

Hon. John Milloy: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, at the committee, they can look into the activities of the member for Whitby–Oshawa, who, we discovered, on May 19 was briefed by Ornge on all of their operations and was given an 18-page deck, outlining all aspects of their operations, including—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. John Milloy:—controversy. Mr. Speaker, what did the honourable member do with that information? Well, Mr. Speaker—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question was for the Premier, and it speaks to the Premier's leadership role and responsibility in this province.

My question was very straightforward: Why is one Minister of Health required to step aside for affairs and the lack of oversight at the Ministry of Health, and why does he protect the current minister? Instead of answering that question, the Premier hides behind his House leader, who doesn't answer the question because it's not his role to answer the question.

I would ask the Premier: Will he at least have the courage to explain to the people of this province why he is failing in his leadership role—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Government House leader.

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I look forward to the committee hearings, when perhaps the member from Whitby–Oshawa, or other representatives, can explain that, when she received the information—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, perhaps they'll explain why the member for Whitby–Oshawa did nothing when she had the briefing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will get a warning next time.

Hon. John Milloy:—nothing, that is, except to lobby the Ministry of Health to have an Ornge base established in her riding—a lobby which, in fact, was successful to the point where she was able to attend a press conference in July and have a flashy picture done of her with an Ornge helicopter that I would be happy to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member knows that that would be classified as a prop and it's not accepted in this House.

New question.

SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENNE

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Michael Mantha: Ma question est au premier ministre. Avec tous les détails concernant les hélicoptères d'Ornge et les implications des compagnies à profit, c'est clair que le vérificateur n'a pas toutes les réponses. Cette Assemblée a passé une motion de créer un comité spécial pour répondre à ce désastre d'Ornge. Est-ce que le gouvernement respectera les décisions de cette Assemblée et mandatera le comité spécial?

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

Hon. John Milloy: J'aimerais remercier le membre pour sa question.

Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out on a number of occasions already today, this Wednesday the public accounts committee, a committee of this Legislature, will be holding hearings into the Ornge situation. It's a chance for members of all sides of the House to share their involvement in the collection of information over the past year or 18 months.

As I said, the member represents the New Democratic Party. Perhaps the leader and the health critic could come forward and explain why they were given this type of detailed briefing note that they have made no end of in question period over the past number of weeks. They were given such a document in December 2010 and failed to raise questions in this House, failed to bring it to the attention of the Minister of Health or failed to talk to—

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, Mr. Speaker, my question was to the Premier, not the House leader.

As money lined the pockets of well-connected insiders, the health minister clearly didn't do her job to oversee the public health care dollars. But it was the Premier's top aide that chose to ignore a January 2011 memo from Ornge detailing their shady ventures. Is the Premier refusing to strike an all-party committee on Ornge because he's worried that the answers might lead straight through his office on the second floor?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the public accounts committee will begin hearings on Wednesday that will last over several sessions. At the same time, the minister has put forward legislation in this House, which, if it passes at second reading, will go to a standing committee of the Legislature. There will be ample time to discuss all aspects of it.

But again, the member stands and makes a big deal out of this memo in January 2011, but he fails to talk about a similar memo which was sent not only to his leader but to the health minister in December 2010, one which outlined all aspects of Ornge operations, including those that have caused so much controversy. I note, Mr. Speaker, that despite having that memo, the NDP failed to raise any questions in this Legislature or make an issue out of the information that they had received.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. My riding of Ottawa Centre is a vibrant and exciting part of the national capital's artistic, cultural and festival scene. Minister, my community is proud to host many of the great attractions in Ottawa, from major events like the Bluesfest, the jazz fest, the tulip festival and Winterlude, to great venues like the National Arts Centre and the great, new, fantastic Ottawa Convention Centre. These are top-notch attractions in Ontario and beyond and are enjoyed by my constituents, but also welcome people from across the province and from around the world.

Speaker, I'm also very proud of another fantastic event in our city this weekend: the Juno Awards, that are coming back to Ottawa. With many events throughout the week and the awards this Sunday evening, can the minister tell us how the government of Ontario is supporting this signature event—

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

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you for the question. I want to thank the honourable member from Ottawa Centre for asking.

I'm proud to say that this week the city of Ottawa, with \$381,000 in support from our government, is hosting the 2012 Juno Awards. Honouring achievement in the Canadian recorded music industry, the Juno Awards will generate \$5 million in direct expenditures by out-of-town visitors, 4,500 booked hotel room nights, and make a \$5.3-million contribution to Ontario's gross domestic product.

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Speaker, the Junos are the most watched award show on CTV in Canada, attracting over 80,000 attendees throughout the week and more than one million television viewers. Our government will continue to support the arts and culture sector in Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: We're very excited for a great weekend ahead in Ottawa with the Juno Awards. This is a great opportunity to showcase our beautiful city and its vibrant cultural scene to our fellow Canadians across the country through a high-profile event like the 2012 Juno Awards.

I'm sure that my constituents, the residents of Ottawa and all Ontarians are pleased to know that our government is supporting this one-of-a-kind annual awards attraction which generates significant economic activity in return.

Could the minister also tell us how our government is helping the music and film sectors to grow and expand into vital new markets and helping to create jobs and economic growth in Ontario? And perhaps he may have an insight as to who may win the best album this year at the Junos.

Hon. Michael Chan: In addition to the Juno Awards taking place in Ottawa, I'm happy to share with you,

Speaker, that just a few days ago, Canadian Music Week and the Canadian Music and Broadcast Industry Awards were held in Toronto. Our government has provided over \$1 million in support of these events since 2005, and over \$8 million to the Ontario music industry since 2003.

In addition, Speaker, after last year's IIFA weekend and awards, our government invested \$90,000 for the Ontario Media Development Corp. in a trade mission to India that, just recently, resulted in a deal between Ontario's Inner City Films and India's Ramoji Film City to co-produce three Bollywood films in Ontario.

Speaker, our film industry experienced a robust year in 2011. We are expecting a great success in—

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

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier, and I hope he will understand that it's time for him to demonstrate a little leadership and actually answer a question.

The Auditor General's scathing report on Ornge has confirmed that your health minister was woefully negligent and ignored numerous warnings that a scandal was brewing. It's not unlike what happened at eHealth, when David Caplan was forced to resign.

Premier, in light of the Auditor General's scathing indictment of the health minister, will you now also ask for your health minister's resignation, as you did for David Caplan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, I will not. I've made that clear several times over now.

I understand, and I think we should accept, that there is an important distinction to be drawn here between the public interest—and our government has a responsibility to uphold the public interest—and the partisan interest being expressed by my colleagues opposite.

The question is, what does the public interest demand in these circumstances? I think it begins with an acknowledgement, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I respect my honourable colleagues' right to make the representations that they do, but we differ in this. I think the public interest demands that we take steps—concrete, substantive measures—to bring the necessary oversight to bear and to introduce new legislation, and we've done that, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier: Premier, this past weekend, the public didn't see things differently. They agreed that just as David Caplan did the honourable thing by resigning, this minister should as well. She acknowledged last week that she didn't read the report in September because she was too busy campaigning; yet she made several announcements as minister during the campaign. Apparently, she could

write cheques during the election but she couldn't oversee a corrupt agency that was putting lives at risk.

I ask you again, will you do the honourable thing? Just like David Caplan did the honourable thing and resign, will you call upon your health minister to also do so?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, Speaker, it's about the public interest and I guess it's only fair that we might have our differences with respect to how we might represent the public interest in here. But I happen to believe that Minister Matthews has done a very good job in her capacity as the Minister of Health. As soon as she was briefed, she took concrete and substantive measures. She sent in a team of forensic accountants. On the basis of that information obtained because of that exercise, she asked that the OPP investigate. She co-operated fully with the Auditor General. She has introduced new legislation in this House. She has entered into a new performance agreement. She has gotten rid of the CEO and introduced a new board of directors. I think all of those speak to our responsibility to uphold the public interest.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission “provides services which are vital to the north's economy and we will not allow it to be privatized”—Dalton McGuinty, March 31, 2003; nice quote. Yet, on Friday, you announced the elimination of the ONTC. Ontario Northland employs nearly 1,000 people. It moves passengers and freight across the north. It's a lifeline for residents in northern Ontario. A lot of them won't be able to travel out of their communities without that service, and that service will not be replaced by private companies. We see that in other parts of the north who have to rely on private companies; they're losing their service. So why, sir, are you allowing your government to turn your back on the residents of northeastern Ontario?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I thank the member for the question, because it is a very, very important issue in northern Ontario. We're not eliminating. The member used the word “eliminating.” Nothing could be further from the truth. We're divesting the ONTC from our government's assets. That's not a foreclosure. Elimination is a foreclosure. We are not foreclosing.

What we are doing is going to be building a stronger transportation system for northeastern Ontario for that corridor. We're going to be working with everyone to ensure that we protect the asset, the worth, of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, so that we're able to maximize, in the new model, jobs—project jobs. In fact, we're very confident that as we move forward, we'll be able to increase jobs and get some of the business back.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: We have all heard this song before: Privatize and the world will be yours. Well, we've

had private winter road maintenance in northern Ontario, and believe me, northerners will tell you that it's not better.

The north is once again rising as the powerhouse of the province. The ONTC could and should be part of that. It was Ontario's development road. It could once again be Ontario's development road, right to the Ring of Fire. Once again, why are you throwing away the province's stake, our stake? Why are you killing the Ontario Northland?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, let me reinforce and emphasize—we're not killing the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. The previous government wanted to kill the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. We're not killing. We are divesting the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. We're putting it up for sale to the private sector because we honestly believe that, as we move forward in developing the enormous potential of the economy of northern Ontario, we can best do that with a modern transportation system that includes not only rail; it includes air. It ensures that we're meeting the potential of northern Ontario with a very, very modern transportation system.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, as you know, aggregates, such as sand and gravel, are vital to Ontario's economy. Aggregates are used to build roads, bridges, hospitals, schools—in fact, much of the infrastructure that all Ontarians use on a daily basis.

While it's true that aggregates are relatively plentiful in Ontario, the State of the Aggregate Resource in Ontario study commissioned by our government shows that rising demand due to population growth, and land constraints, such as in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, could significantly deplete aggregate resources within 20 years. The report also found that there is serious public concern about the social and environmental costs of aggregate extraction and transportation. Can the minister please update the members of this House how our government is managing aggregate resources in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for raising this very important question. I think it's fair to say that all members of this House recognize that aggregate resources are indeed necessary for our economy, to keep building the infrastructure that Ontario relies upon, including roads, bridges and hospitals.

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Because the public sector is the largest purchaser of aggregates in Ontario, we want to ensure adequate supply of aggregates now and in the future at the fairest price for Ontario taxpayers.

I also know, Mr. Speaker, that working together, we can balance our need for aggregates while also ensuring we protect our water and our environment. That is why all parties of this House have agreed to refer a review of

the Aggregate Resources Act to a standing committee, a move that was unanimously supported in the Legislature last week. I look forward to working with all the parties in the House to get the review right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: I'm glad that our government is taking such a balanced approach. I raise this question because a number of my constituents have expressed concerns about the impact of aggregate extraction on our natural environment. In particular, my constituents are concerned that the heightened demand for aggregates may lead to new extraction around the Oak Ridges moraine, where it is currently restricted in order to protect its natural heritage.

Minister, I know that my constituents are not the only ones raising these concerns. I've heard that similar issues have been raised in other communities, especially as it relates to the loss of agricultural lands and impacts on their water.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What specifically is your ministry doing to address these concerns?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want the member from Oak Ridges–Markham and other members to let their constituents know that our government has certainly listened to their concerns and the concerns raised by communities regarding the extraction of aggregates in Ontario and its potential impact on the environment.

I'm certainly very pleased the motion passed last week with unanimous consent, and I do think it's fair to say that we expect each party on the Standing Committee on General Government will be giving it a full review and will come forward with recommendations that will strengthen the act by seeking advice and insight from key stakeholders. The all-party committee certainly provides a wonderful opportunity to ensure that we all have a say in the management of this vital resource. So I'm looking forward to the recommendations the all-party committee brings forward, and as the process unfolds, we're committed to sharing those details of the review with the people of Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Premier. In relation to the eHealth boondoggle, the auditor reported \$1 billion wasted when the computer system was not up and running.

In regard to the Ornge debacle, the auditor reported on \$1 billion spent on helicopters that had their windows blown out and rotors falling off, and operational problems that are a concern of the coroner, looking into it as a possible cause of death.

Premier, I would like to know why David Caplan lost his job and Minister Matthews keeps hers. Premier, leadership is about making tough decisions when necessary. Why does Minister Matthews keep her job when you threw Caplan under the bus? I ask you to do the right thing and ask the health minister to resign.

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

Hon. John Milloy: As I mentioned in this House Wednesday, comprehensive hearings by a standing committee of this Legislature—in fact, chaired by the honourable member's party—will be looking into the Ornge situation. They'll have a chance to learn first-hand of the actions that the minister took when she found out about wrongdoing. She replaced the board and the CEO. She replaced the new performance agreement. She called in forensic auditors. She introduced tough new legislation.

But it will also be an opportunity for the member from Whitby-Ajax to talk about her briefing on May 19 and why, when she was given detailed information about Ornge operations, she failed to ask questions in this Legislature. She failed to alert the authorities or the Minister of Health. All she did, Mr. Speaker, was lobby to have an Ornge base in her riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll once again redirect to the Premier. It's shameful to sidestep. The Premier keeps protecting the Minister of Health from accountability for Ornge, saying she is needed to drive other reforms. With Ornge on her resumé, I would suggest she isn't qualified for the job.

Does the Premier believe there's no one else in his whole caucus who is capable of doing a better job than the current health minister? Premier, it's absurd that you would continue to excuse this type of behaviour. The minister needs to accept responsibility for the misdeeds under her watch.

I ask you again: Why are you not firing her? Will you do the right thing and ask her for her resignation?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. If this happens again, I wanted to make sure that you heard my first comment when the desks were being pounded. In case you didn't hear it because of the noise, I will begin to look at individual members, and I will bring them to order. If they do not come to order, I will name them. I want the minister to answer the question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And if the member from Durham continues to speak while I'm speaking, he will be named.

Interjection: Name him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don't need that either.

Start the clock. Minister.

Hon. John Milloy: Like I said, Mr. Speaker, Wednesday's public accounts meeting will be a chance to discuss all aspects of this, including as I've said, why, when the member received the briefing on May 19, the only follow-up she did was to continue to lobby for an Ornge base in her riding. I quote from a letter she sent to the Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health: "As you know, Ornge is planning to relocate one of its air ambulance helicopters to the eastern greater Toronto area in order to enhance its emergency response coverage. Based on my meetings with concerned stakeholders, there are

numerous advantages to support introducing this service to Oshawa."

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. In January 2011, Debbie Sevenpifer was fired as CEO at the Niagara Health System. According to the sunshine list last week, she received a payment of \$618,000. But according to the NHS, that's only part of her severance.

Does the Premier think that handing a hospital CEO a six- or seven-digit cheque after being fired is a good use of front-line health care dollars?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague that we have worked very hard on our side to introduce more transparency and more accountability with respect to these kinds of issues. I say to my honourable colleague that the correct kinds of questions she asked herself with respect to this particular issue are the kinds of questions that we of course ask ourselves over here. I say to my honourable colleague as well, I think I've made it public that I've already asked the finance minister to take into account, in the delivery of his budget, specific new measures that we might put in place to deal with these very kinds of issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Whether it's closing local hospital emergency departments like in Port Colborne and Fort Erie, or failing to provide adequate mental health services in Niagara, families in Niagara have watched their health care system erode before their eyes. They're rightly outraged when their health care system hands over over \$600,000 in a severance package.

CEO severance packages need to be capped. Why won't the Premier condemn this golden handshake to the Niagara Health System's former CEO?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think the sentiment that I share with my honourable colleague and, I assume, all colleagues in this House is that the message we want to send to those people who have the privilege of serving on our hospital boards is that they need to be accountable to taxpayers, not just in the community but right across the province. They need to understand how important it is that we send as many of those precious taxpayer dollars all the way to the front lines in terms of better services.

We've had some tremendous success in that regard. We have the shortest wait times in Canada. We've built a number of new hospitals; we have expanded close to 100 others. We've made real progress, and the message that we're sending together, I believe, as a Legislature, to all those people who sit on our boards is that it's very important to be mindful of the responsibility they owe to Ontario taxpayers.

VISITORS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I rise on a point of order. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce Jim Boudreau and his

lovely wife, Patti, who are up in the public gallery. Jim is the MLA for Guysborough–Sheet Harbour in Darrell Dexter’s NDP government in Nova Scotia. In our recent Ontario election, Jim came all the way up to Kenora–Rainy River to help get me elected, and for that I thank him.

MINISTER’S COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge on a point of order.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, on a point of privilege: I’ve given your office notice of a matter of privilege I wish to raise. May I proceed?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am aware of the member’s writings. I would ask him to give us a brief summary of the point of privilege, and I will hear the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to summarize my notice that I gave your office earlier this morning. Pursuant to standing order 21(c), I provided the Speaker with the required written notice of a point of privilege that I’m raising.

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During question period of Thursday, March 22, I heard multiple statements from the Minister of Health that concerned me. As such, I’m raising this point of privilege for her contempt of the Legislature at the earliest opportunity. These statements made by the Minister of Health misled the Legislature by telling the Legislature something that was not true and affected the opposition’s ability to hold the government to account. I am asking you to find a prima facie case that a breach of privilege occurred that constitutes contempt of this Legislature.

During question period, the Minister of Health stated that she did not take immediate action with the draft copy of the Auditor General’s report to the Ministry of Health because “I was not sworn in.” The minister further stated multiple times throughout oral questions that she was “not sworn in” as minister until October. This contravenes section 2 of the Executive Council Act. The act states that serving at the pleasure means that a minister serves in their role until the order in council is rescinded.

At the issuing of the writs, while a cabinet minister in the previous Parliament may not be a sitting member of the Legislature, he or she remains a cabinet minister until replaced. This has been part of parliamentary practice for centuries.

The Minister of Health was sworn in as health minister in October 2009. She has not and cannot produce an order in council that rescinded that appointment. She knew she was still the minister when she made her misleading remarks in the House. She made announcements. She still got ministerial pay when she collected her paycheque.

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party even informed the health minister that the clerks of this House

stated “that the cabinet stays in effect, charged with all of their responsibilities, during an election campaign.” This further shows that she demonstrated wilful blindness to the facts before her and demonstrates that the minister attempted to mislead this House.

Later in Thursday’s question—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Cambridge, a few times you’ve used the assumption of misleading the House. I would ask you to temper your language to ensure that that does not prejudice what I need to find.

Mr. Rob Leone: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Later in Thursday’s question period, the Minister of Health changed her position on the responsibility of a minister without withdrawing her previous statements. She stated, “The member opposite knows full well that when the House is dissolved, when we are in that interim period between the writ dropping and the new cabinet being sworn in, there are limitations on the activities of ministers.” Based on her statement, “there are limitations on the activities of ministers,” she recognizes that the minister is still a minister during the writ period. This demonstrates that her statements suggesting that she was not sworn in are not an honest mistake of fact; they’re rather a strategy to interfere with the practice of the opposition holding the government to account.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wrap up, please.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, give me one second. I did summarize this for you. I guess the summary wasn’t quite enough for you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’ve read the original as well.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, I’m going to draw your attention to the Honourable Steve Peters, who on September 28, 2009, quoted David McGee’s Parliamentary Practice. I think you have the quote, so I won’t go with that.

The three criteria that Mr. McGee stated are, I think, effective in this case. The first is the statement that the minister was not sworn in can be construed as being misleading due to the fact that it is, in fact, incorrect. Secondly, despite being told by the leader of the third party that the Clerk said otherwise, the minister stated, “When I was sworn in as minister ... after the election;” in this statement, the Minister of Health, despite knowing that the clerks confirmed that she was a cabinet minister during the writ, implied that she was not sworn in during the election. Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the intent from the minister to allegedly mislead the Legislature is demonstrated by the information provided from the clerks’ table. The Minister of Health intentionally ignored that information in an attempt to cleanse her from the issues involving Ornge that arose during that campaign.

Further, O’Brien and Bosc define contempt as “any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions.” The health minister’s statement that she was not sworn in obstructs the opposition from holding the government to account and, as a result, constitutes contempt for this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, our role as parliamentarians is to represent our constituents. For opposition MPPs, we have the additional role of holding the government to account. Oral questions is time for MPPs to get information from ministers based on the inquiries that we receive from our constituents. In other words, we are the liaison between our constituents and the government. The words of ministers of the crown are fundamentally important because we have to go back to our constituents to inform them of the government's response. It is unacceptable for the House to be misled by a minister because it counters our duties to our constituents.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, at the very least, that you recognize the severe nature of these misleading statements and, like Speaker Milliken of our federal Parliament, refer this matter to an appropriate committee of the Legislature, even if it's only to clear the air. Should you find that a *prima facie* case of contempt does in fact exist, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion and to refer the case to a committee of the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his letter originally and for his summation now, and I do remind him one more time that you are not to make any other prejudiced comments about misleading as it was not germane to my decision pre—I need to make that decision afterwards. So I want to thank the member.

The government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to respond to the point of privilege presented by the member from Cambridge regarding certain answers given by the Minister of Health during question period on March 22, 2012.

As we've heard, the member claims that contempt of this House occurred from certain answers that the Minister of Health gave on the date. Specifically, he asserts the very serious charge that the minister deliberately misled the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would point you and other members of the Legislature to comments made by Speaker Carr on June 17, 2002, in regard to a similar matter raised by the then-member for Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos. The Speaker ruled, "The threshold for finding a *prima facie* case of contempt against a member of the Legislature on the basis of deliberately misleading the House is therefore set quite high and is very uncommon. It must involve a proved finding of an overt attempt to intentionally mislead the Legislature. In the absence of an admission from the member accused of the conduct, or of tangible confirmation of the conduct independently proved, a Speaker must assume that no honourable member would engage in such behaviour or that, at most, inconsistent statements were the result of inadvertence or honest mistake."

While remarks made by the Minister of Health on Thursday may have required further explanation or clarification, they in no way demonstrated a deliberate

attempt on the minister's part to mislead anyone. I wish to refer members to the matter involving the Honourable Art Eggleton concerning comments he made in the Canadian House of Commons about the handling of captured prisoners by Canadian troops in Afghanistan, as summarized in O'Brien and Bosc: "In his appearance before the committee" that was looking into the matter, "the Clerk of the House referred to Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand where it is stated that the following elements have to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt for deliberately misleading the House: one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House...."

I'd be happy to provide you, Mr. Speaker, with the references to that appearance.

On pages 2 and 5 of the letter from the member from Cambridge, he admits that the minister continued to clarify her remarks throughout questioning. I would argue that this hardly seems like the behaviour of someone attempting to deliberately mislead this chamber. There's simply no case to be made that the minister either knowingly or intentionally misled this House.

Mr. Speaker, through you, with the greatest respect, I would also caution the member from Cambridge that a continuous spree of frivolous points of privilege dilutes the seriousness of such accusations, especially this one. Accusing a member of contempt is both serious and consequential. Not only has the member from Cambridge failed to provide convincing evidence on his case, but he's lowered the level of dignity and discourse in this place by tossing around such very serious charges carelessly.

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

Point of order?

Mr. Jim Wilson: On the same point of privilege: It's unfortunate, the language that the House leader for the Liberal government has used there. In fact, I think he owes the member from Cambridge an apology on those very comments. It's really quite below this honourable member, who is an honourable man on normal occasions.

Mr. Speaker, when I read the very well-researched, five-page submission by our honourable colleague from Cambridge, I think that the point, from a layman's point of view, was that the minister had an opportunity during that exchange, because she was reminded by the leader of the third party that the table officers had indicated that she still served as a cabinet minister during the writ. During that debate, she heard that several times from the NDP, from ourselves, and she may have even heard the table itself say that. The fact of the matter is, she did not correct her behaviour, and she continued to use the ploy that she wasn't in elected office or wasn't responsible during this period of time. To me, that is misleading the House in a purposeful way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you for everyone's input. I appreciate the opportunity to hear

your concerns, and I will reserve my ruling on this in due course.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COLLINGWOOD BLACKHAWKS

Mr. Jim Wilson: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to applaud the recent victory of the Collingwood Atom A Blackhawks. On home ice at the Eddie Bush Arena on Saturday, the Collingwood Blackhawks defeated the Whitby Wildcats in a 3-0 victory to win the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship and sweep the series.

The Collingwood Blackhawks have been unstoppable this year, having been undefeated in the Ontario Minor Hockey Association playdowns, beating Owen Sound, Brampton, Burlington and Grimsby before defeating Whitby for the championship on Saturday.

It's also exciting for many of the players on the team who are now celebrating their third OMHA title, from their novice win in 2010 to an Atom win last year, and now this year's impressive win over Whitby. Saturday's shutout means that Collingwood will now go on to compete in the prestigious Ontario Hockey Federation championships, where Collingwood will compete with the four regional Atom champions.

This is the first time in the history of Collingwood minor hockey that a Collingwood team has qualified for the Ontario Hockey Federation championships. The tournament will take place in Cobourg from April 13 to 15.

People from around Collingwood are cheering today and are extremely proud of their hometown team. Without question, the Blackhawks' clean and upbeat approach to hockey has gained them an admirable reputation throughout Ontario.

I know I speak for all members of this Legislature in congratulating the Collingwood Atom A Blackhawks on being the Ontario Minor Hockey Association champions and for the immeasurable amount of time, commitment and sacrifice that they make to their sport of hockey.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations, Blackhawks.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I want to make a few comments regarding clean energy. Ontarians work hard every day to make better lives for themselves and their children. Our government is working hard, too. Just like families across the province, when times are tight, we have to make careful choices—choices that support the needs and aspirations of all Ontarians; choices that will create jobs for Ontario families.

That's why I'm proud that our government is investing in economic development in places where it is really needed. That's why I'm disappointed that the official opposition voted against the attracting jobs and investment act and the thousands of local jobs it would have created in our communities.

The PCs are putting ideology ahead of helping small businesses create jobs across the province. This act would help companies across eastern and southwestern Ontario to expand their workforce, buy state-of-the-art equipment, and compete and win in a global economy.

The Conservatives are using the global recession to push ideology, tearing down rather than helping to build a stronger Ontario. The NDP has been silent on eliminating the deficit and creating jobs. They're quick to criticize new ideas, but have no suggestion of their own. Our government, on the other hand, has a balanced plan and is making thoughtful choices to eliminate the deficit and grow the economy and create jobs.

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Michael Harris: I am pleased to take this opportunity to inform the House and members of the public about the time-honoured tradition in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga that I look forward to every year.

Right now, organizers in Elmira are busy preparing for the 40th annual maple syrup festival, where my team and I will be serving the best pancakes in the region, drenched in Elmira's legendary maple syrup.

I also want to give my colleague Elizabeth Witmer fair warning that this year's Team Harris will defeat the reigning champions, her daughter Sarah's Mother Flippers, in the annual pancake-flipping contest.

On a serious note, though, I want to congratulate the more than 2,000 volunteers who work every year to ensure that the maple syrup festival upholds its Guinness World Record for being the largest festival of its kind. With more than 65,000 people attending each year, this festival has done so much to promote Elmira, the surrounding areas, local maple syrup producers and, most important, a unique sense of community spirit.

For years, the proceeds of the maple syrup festival have played a major role in supporting local organizations and building stronger ties amongst residents. Typically, 40% of the proceeds from the festival go to support people with developmental disabilities in my riding, while the remaining funds are divided amongst other charitable organizations.

This festival not only provides families with an excellent way to spend some time together, but it also serves as an example of what people can do to benefit their community. So I encourage everyone to join me at the maple syrup festival in Elmira this weekend.

DANFORTH EAST COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Mr. Michael Prue: We have a wonderful group in Beaches–East York called the Danforth East Community

Association, or DECA, as we like to call them. They have been responsible and continue to be responsible for revitalizing that area of Danforth Avenue east of GreekTown, which I think is known by pretty much everyone across the country. They have organized a number of community events over the last couple of years—events for children, jazz festivals, arts.

A few weeks ago, they brought a wonderful man all the way from Australia by the name of Marcus Westbury, from Newcastle, Australia. He came to talk about revitalizing downtown cores and the wonderful job that they have done in Australia. This was done in conjunction with the Gerrard bazaar BIA. What Marcus was able to show is that you can revitalize a derelict downtown into a tourist town. They fixed up the storefronts. They filled the vacant buildings. They used a lot of it for community space. That is what DECA wants to emulate here.

I was pleased to meet with Anita Schretten, Tanya Geisler, Catherine Pekelmy and Ciara Behan. We talked about flower planting, facades repainting and involving the entire community in order to keep costs down for business but also to make sure that local people have an input as to how those improvements will affect the community.

My congratulations to DECA and everything they continue to do.

BIRTHING CENTRES

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I rise in the House today to acknowledge and applaud our government's decision to create two birthing centres in the province of Ontario. This service will not only provide women with more choice on where they can deliver babies, but it's part of our government's health plan to move more health care services out of hospitals and into the community, where we can safely do so.

Specifically, I would like to acknowledge the fine work by Lisa Weston and the nine other midwives who work at Sages-Femmes Rouge Valley Midwives. These passionate and hard-working midwives serve women and families in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East and all of Durham and mothers from across both Durham region and greater Scarborough. These centres will be run in partnership with Ontario midwives, who attended more than 15,000 births last year.

This is one part of our government's action plan for health care and our commitment to quality care delivered with better results and good value. As a mother of two children, it's great to see a service that provides more choices for women in terms of how and when they deliver their babies.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: As you know, Ontario's economy is struggling. Our unemployment is the highest in the country, with over 600,000 people out of work.

Currently, at age 65, a driver holding a class A licence in Ontario is required to take a mandatory road test to simply keep their job. The current requirement adds significant costs and act as a real drain on our economy. Workers are required to take multiple days off to rent, hire and insure a truck and trailer, not to mention lost wages and time away from family. Additionally, trucking companies need to find replacement workers and often have no choice but to decline contracts due to uncertainty caused by this needless requirement. Drivers themselves are often reluctant to accept work and assignments in the immediate time following their mandatory age 65 road test due to this regulation.

In most jobs, when you work hard and gain experience, you're rewarded and advanced, but in this case, the most experienced and most seasoned drivers face unnecessary red tape, government bureaucracy, and discrimination.

Since my election, I have consulted with associations, stakeholders, drivers and workers. The entire trucking industry is saying the same thing: Something needs to change, the McGuinty government just doesn't get it, and it's time for new direction.

The McGuinty government is moving too slowly on this issue. The industry is calling for action, and so am I.

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HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Today in Kenora, members of the public are standing together in solidarity to oppose proposed cuts to our health care system. They are worried, as am I, that if the government moves forward with many of their cost-cutting measures, as proposed in the Drummond report, their community's hospital will lose care beds, as well as many other communities across my riding and across the province of Ontario.

Health care in my region is already under attack, facing significant challenges as a result of service models based on southern Ontario realities that simply do not exist in our region. Our smaller health care centres, like those in Rainy River and Ear Falls, are under significant threat as a result of government inaction on this issue. This is creating a strain on all hospitals and community health care centres in our region who are forced to pick up the slack.

I would like to take this time to express my gratitude to those citizens in Kenora and across my riding who are standing up to proposed cuts and government inaction, and I would once again like to ask the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to step up to the plate, acknowledge the challenges that are facing our region and work with me and all stakeholders to find a solution.

NORTH YORK GENERAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Michael Coteau: I rise today on a very unique occasion. On behalf of the residents of my riding, Don Valley East, I'd like to extend heartfelt congratulations to

Dr. Tim Rutledge, president and CEO, and his entire team at North York General Hospital for receiving the highest designation from Accreditation Canada. This is a rare achievement for any hospital or health care provider in this country.

After being evaluated using over 1,800 different criteria, North York General Hospital has received accreditation with exemplary standing for meeting 100% of the required practices and standards in all areas of the hospital, including all patient care programs, administrative functions and community engagement.

North York General Hospital has implemented various initiatives over the past years which have contributed to this recent achievement. It has launched a computerized provider order entry system that combines the latest clinical evidence from medical literature, making it possible for medical practitioners to provide the best-quality care for their patients.

Further, North York General Hospital has implemented a bar code scanning system, which is the first in Canada. Bar code scanning uniquely identifies each medication and each patient across medical, surgical and critical care units.

Receiving accreditation with exemplary standing assures patients and their families that the care they are receiving from North York General Hospital is of the highest quality. We're extremely proud to have such a dedicated health care service provider in our riding of Don Valley East.

EPILEPSY

Mr. Rod Jackson: Today is an important day. It's epilepsy awareness day.

Epilepsy is one of the most common neurological disorders. It affects over 100,000 Canadians and over 65,000 Ontarians—

Interjection: Too many.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Far too many.

Though this area is broadly researched in public awareness, sometimes stigma can make life with epilepsy more difficult for people than it needs to be. With one in every 100 people living with epilepsy, awareness and a basic knowledge about the condition is very important.

I'd like to recognize two organizations working towards greater awareness about epilepsy: the Epilepsy Cure Initiative and Epilepsy Ontario. These organizations reach out to the public, support individuals and families living with epilepsy, participate in advocacy and awareness campaigns, and often contribute to research initiatives.

Epilepsy has also touched my family, and from this experience I know how challenging it can be for an individual and for a family. The management of this condition, concerns with driving and medication, access to treatment as well as strain on family are realities that are realized when living with epilepsy.

As a public, it's our duty to understand this condition and do what we can to make life a little better for those

that are living with epilepsy. For this, awareness is something I think is paramount. Today is about all those courageous people managing their epilepsy. I notice that there are a few people in the House today wearing purple today in honour of those that suffer with epilepsy, and I thank you for that.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION AMENDMENT ACT (RETROFITTING OF RETIREMENT HOMES WITH AUTOMATIC SPRINKLERS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PRÉVENTION ET LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'INCENDIE (MODERNISATION DES MAISONS DE RETRAITE PAR L'INSTALLATION D'EXTINCTEURS AUTOMATIQUES)

Mr. Paul Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 54, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 to require the retrofitting of retirement homes with automatic sprinklers / Projet de loi 54, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la prévention et la protection contre l'incendie pour exiger la modernisation des maisons de retraite par l'installation d'extincteurs automatiques.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, this bill amends the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, to require that all retirement homes be retrofitted with a system of automatic sprinklers.

PETITIONS

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Toby Barrett: The petition here is organized by PAFE, Parents as First Educators.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, as an anti-bullying measure, Bill 13 is unnecessary because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

"Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

"Whereas legislation is not the way to implement equity education (this should rather be addressed by

teacher training, after wider parental consultation, in a way which respects the views of people of faith);

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to vote against Bill 113.”

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

“Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario’s horse racing and breeding industry;

“Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

“Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

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

“Call on the government of Ontario to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

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

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition from a group of residents from York South–Weston addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

“Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

“Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

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

“Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice.”

I support this petition. I will be affixing my signature and handing it over to page Nicholas.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to restore local control.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government is forcing Ontario municipalities to build industrial wind and solar power generation facilities without any local say or local approval; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government transferred decision-making power from elected municipal” councils “to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats, who are accountable to no one; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has removed any kind of appeal process for municipalities or for people living in close proximity to these projects; and

“Whereas Tim Hudak, Jim Wilson and the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party have committed to restoring local decision-making powers and to building renewable energy projects only in places where they are welcomed, wanted and at prices Ontario families can afford;

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

“That the McGuinty government restore local decision-making powers for renewable energy projects and immediately stop forcing new industrial wind and solar developments on municipalities that have not approved them and whose citizens do not want them in their community.”

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

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury—more precisely, from Chelmsford—and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

“Whereas” since “October 2009, insured PET scans” are “performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

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

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through” Health Sciences North, “thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

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

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Solray Energy Corp. has given notice of its proposal for a class 3 solar power facility known as Epsom Solar Farm to be located in the township of Scugog; and

“Whereas the site is on prime” agricultural land “that has been in production for many generations; and

“Whereas we consider productive farmland to be of vital importance to farm and rural communities by providing healthy, locally grown food and ensuring the sustainability of Canada’s food supply; and

“Whereas class 1 to 5 farmland and land that is zoned rural or agricultural should be protected from the current proposal and similar” proposals “that may be considered in the future; and

“Whereas other sites of less value to agriculture are better locations for solar” production development;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the” Legislative Assembly of Ontario “not to allow large, industrial solar farms on prime agricultural land, and we further express our support for giving local communities, through their elected municipal councils, the power to control and approve large-scale renewable energy developments.”

I am pleased to sign and support it and give it to Aylin, one of the new pages here.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

“Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

“Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

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

“That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario’s agricultural and rural economies.”

Speaker, I agree with this. I’ll add my signature and I’ll send it with Alexander to the clerks’ desk.

SKILLED TRADES

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

“Whereas a new policy from the Electrical Safety Authority that mandates that all electrical contractors must have at least one licensed master electrician on staff

for every business effective December 31, 2011, is forcing electrical contracting small businesses ... out of business;

“Whereas this ESA policy severely impacts small electrical contracting businesses in Ontario. George, in my riding ... who has been” an electrical contractor “for the past 51 years and a small business ... for the past 36 years, who has good standing with the Electrical Safety Authority, Ontario Hydro, local utilities, who follows the same rules and regulations of the ESA, follows the Ontario electrical codes, adheres to the same inspections and pays the same fees as large companies” has now been forced out of business. “Effective December 31, 2011, George will no longer be licensed to practise in Ontario” and has been forced to close his business.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Consumer Services to direct the Electrical Safety Authority of Ontario to modify the licensing requirements to allow small electrical contractors and self-employed electricians to work in the residential and rural market without the unnecessary burden of obtaining a master electrician licence, or at the very minimum, grandfather those who are currently qualified and entitled to work in Ontario.”

I support this petition and will be signing it and passing it to page Felix.

WIND TURBINES

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

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I think that's a good idea, Mr. Speaker. I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Grand Erie District School Board has purposely gerrymandered busing, circumvented its own catchment areas, avoided all but the most basic facility improvements and actively positioned PDCS for closure before and during the ARC process;

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

“We petition the Legislature of Ontario to conduct an inquiry into the actions of the Grand Erie District School Board over the past 10 years leading up to the current accommodation review.

“In addition, we call upon the Legislature to put a moratorium on all current and pending school closures in the province of Ontario.”

GREENBELT

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. This one is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Greenbelt Act was passed by the Ontario Legislature in 2005, affecting property rights in Ontario; and

“Whereas the right to own, use, enjoy and the opportunity to earn a living from private property is the basis of freedom and democracy; and

“Whereas the greenbelt restricts property owners in the use, enjoyment and ability to earn a living from their private property; and

“Whereas property owners are not being compensated for any loss of these rights;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the greenbelt plan area at the 10-year re-evaluation in 2015 to allow ... development when requested by the community and supported”—more importantly here—by local communities to allow people to enjoy their right to their property.

I’m pleased to sign this petition, in support of it, and present it to Abbigail, one of the new pages here.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a large collection of anti-wind turbine petitions.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

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“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I affix my signature to these petitions.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present another petition from my riding of Durham, which is as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the greenbelt; and

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and provincially sensitive wetlands; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier governments to plan, protect and enforce”—

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: Excuse me a moment here—my colleague Mr. Shurman.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don’t heckle your members.

Mr. John O’Toole: —“governments to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries; and

“Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Minister of the Environment” and the Minister of Natural Resources, who is here, “to initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provin-

cial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the greenbelt, specifically” in my riding of Durham, on Lakeridge Road, as well as in Newcastle.

I’m pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents. The former Minister of the Environment is here—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

MEMBERS’ PRIVILEGES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to rise today on a point of privilege. I have provided you the written notice of a point of privilege, pursuant to standing order 21(c), so that I may raise the matter in the House.

The question of privilege relates to interference by a member of the Ontario Liberal caucus bureau with my free movement within the legislative precinct on Thursday afternoon, following the flag-raising ceremony in recognition of Greek Independence Day. I am raising this matter of privilege at the earliest opportunity.

The facts on which this matter is raised are as follows: I attended the flag-raising ceremony on the front lawn of the Legislature with Bill Walker, MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Immediately following the ceremony, Mr. Walker and I made our way to committee room 230, where we had a scheduled meeting with Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller. To get to the committee room, we had to pass through a corridor leading to the entrance of the Liberal caucus boardroom. The boardroom was being used to host an exclusive reception for members of the Greek-Canadian community. As Mr. Walker and I walked through the corridor, a member of the Liberal staff stepped in front of me and physically blocked the corridor by extending his arm in front of me. He apparently assumed Mr. Walker and I intended to attend the reception, because he advised us that it was a “private event,” and that we were not permitted. It took me somewhat by surprise, because we were in the hallway and not the entrance of the boardroom. When I told him I was actually heading to a meeting elsewhere, he allowed us to pass so I could continue on to my meeting with the Environmental Commissioner—at least not immediately. All of this occurred in front of visiting dignitaries and guests from the community, Mr. Speaker.

Freedom of movement in the legislative precinct is a privilege of members that has been recognized by legislative authorities and established by parliamentary precedent.

In House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Marleau and Montpetit state, “The House has the authority to invoke privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties.”

In House of Commons Procedure and Practice, O’Brien and Bosc explain both the privilege and the role

of the Speaker in more detail. In chapter 3, which deals with privileges and immunities of members, they state, “In circumstances where members claim to be physically obstructed, impeded, interfered with or intimidated in the performance of their parliamentary functions, the Speaker is apt to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred.”

Speaker Fraser ruled on this particular privilege in 1989, Mr. Speaker, following a protest at the House of Commons. The member of Parliament for Windsor West was stopped by security at a roadblock and prevented from accessing Centre Block by car. On October 30, 1989, Speaker Fraser found that even though the argument could be made that the member was free to walk to Centre Block, a prima facie case for obstruction existed. The matter was referred to a standing committee.

In 1999, Speaker Parent considered a point of privilege that was raised by members of Parliament who had difficulty accessing their offices. The members stated that the impediment prevented them from performing their functions and meeting their obligations in a timely fashion. Speaker Parent ruled that a prima facie breach of privilege existed and referred the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Perhaps the most significant precedent comes from this Legislative Assembly, with Speaker Peters’s ruling of May 4, 2010, in respect to members of the Ontario PC caucus being obstructed on budget day 2010. In that instance, as here, Mr. Speaker, staff from the Ontario Liberal caucus bureau physically prevented members of the opposition from attending to parliamentary duties. There, it was to be present in the chamber, while here, it was to attend a meeting with an officer of the Legislature. In that instance, as here, the breach of privilege embarrassed the opposition in the presence of dignitaries and invited guests.

I appreciate that the government will try to minimize the breach that occurred, as they did when the budget day obstruction occurred. If so, then the following from Speaker Peters is important to consider:

“For a prima facie case of privilege to be established, it is enough ... that members wanted to attend the House and were, at least for a time and against their will, prevented from doing so. It is of no significance where such an obstruction occurred or what parliamentary proceeding members were prevented from attending.

“Further investigation may well reveal a plausible explanation or mitigating circumstances for what occurred in the budget lock-up on March 25, but I do believe that such a further investigation is warranted.”

I respectfully submit that there is no conclusion but that a prima facie breach of privilege has been established for the events that occurred on Thursday. I was physically obstructed, impeded and interfered with when I tried to make my way with Mr. Walker to committee room 230 to meet with the Environmental Commissioner. While the interference was short-lived, it clearly occurred. Upon your ruling that a prima facie breach of privilege exists, I am prepared to move the matter be

referred to an appropriate committee of the Legislature for a hearing into the facts and circumstances that led to the breach.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that I expand on one aspect of my letter to ensure that you can fully appreciate the action of this staffer. When I say in the letter that he blocked me, I should tell you that he actually extended his arm, physically restraining my passage. He did this in full view of members of the public, including dignitaries who had been invited to the Greek Independence Day reception.

1340

Clearly, he left the impression in the eyes of those visitors to the Legislature that the authority of a Liberal Party staff member transcended that of an opposition member of provincial Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, while I was not here two years ago, I must tell you that the facts surrounding the point of privilege accepted by Speaker Peters two years ago are virtually identical to the facts in this matter. Speaker Peters ruled that it wasn't his job to determine whether the breach of a member's privileges was serious or minor; his ruling made it clear that that was the job of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. His ruling did make it clear, though, that impeding the free access of a member was a serious matter and one worthy of referral to that committee.

I am deeply troubled by the need to stand before you and raise this issue. After a great deal of reflection and having reviewed the facts of Speaker Peters's ruling of two years ago, I cannot, in good conscience, let the unwarranted action of this Liberal staff member go unchallenged. It is somewhat ironic that the issue raised before Speaker Peters occurred on budget day in 2010 and we are, today, on the cusp of the announcement of this year's budget. For anyone who, like me, believes in the ultimate authority of Parliament, it is immensely disappointing that Liberal staffers would appear to have learned nothing from the ruling of your predecessor two years ago.

Restricting my free access to walk the halls of Queen's Park can only be considered breaches of my privileges as a member of provincial Parliament. Given the facts of this matter, and the precedent of the Speaker's ruling in 2010, I would ask for your ruling in the affirmation that I have suffered a breach of privilege.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the independence day ceremony out on the front lawn is symbolic. I heard the fine Minister Sousa, the member from Scarborough Southwest, the member from Beaches–East York and, of course, my esteemed colleague the member for Whitby–Oshawa, who so eloquently put how proud they were to stand there on the front lawn, praising the great nation of Greece, the founding fathers of democracy and the freedoms which we enjoy, and yet on this particular point I was obstructed in democracy.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask for your ruling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. On the same point of privilege, the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Speaker, I, too, was denied entry on that day to Room 247. I was on the front lawn with members of my community, my neighbours, my friends and people with whom I had worked for many years in the Greek community. I was invited, along with everyone else who was on that lawn, by the member from Scarborough Southwest to attend the reception. You can imagine my horror when I got upstairs and was denied entry by a staffer named Dylan. When I challenged that staffer, he told me he was under direct orders that no one except Liberals could enter.

I was so angry, I came down the stairs and wrote a letter to the government House leader, which he undoubtedly has by now, with a carbon copy to the NDP House leader and the Conservative House leader outlining the umbrage that I felt, being denied access to a public celebration in honour of the Greek community.

If I was good enough to be asked by the government side to come out and say words of praise to the Greek community, I think I should have been welcomed in with my friends. I have to tell you that I was with one of the directors of the Pan-Macedonian Association of Ontario, a woman by the name of Sue Keramidopoulis. We were separated at the door. She was allowed to enter and I was not. It was extremely embarrassing to me. It was embarrassing to the president of the Greek community of Toronto. He told me at the celebration the following night—it was in Markham—that he too was embarrassed. He didn't know what to do, but he felt the entire Greek community had been slighted.

When I wrote to the government House leader, I also sent a carbon copy to the Speaker. I'm not sure whether you're going to rule this is a question of privilege or not, but I think that any time a public celebration is held in any room, be it a government room, an opposition room or any other room, if it is open to the public, then it needs to be open to the members of the opposition as well, and that's the point I'm trying to make.

I understand that that room is used for government purposes; I understand. We have a caucus room too, as do my colleagues of the Conservative Party, and when it is a private meeting, it is a private meeting. But this was a public meeting to celebrate the events of 1821 and the broader Greek community. To separate out who in this chamber can enter that room on such an occasion and who cannot, I think, was a gross violation.

When I challenged Dylan, he made it very clear to me that those were the orders under which he was acting. He was acting under explicit orders, and he stepped between me and the door so that I could not enter. I do want to say that the member from Scarborough Southwest, when he heard I was barred, attempted to mediate and come out, but was told by Dylan as well that those were his instructions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Same point?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the fact that I was given notice of this point of privilege by the member opposite, but I have to apologize; I only received that notice just at the end of question period around noon

hour. I did some very initial digging, Mr. Speaker, and I don't know all the facts of the situation. I do know that there was absolutely no intention, in any way, to impede members of this Legislature from their duties here in the Legislature, and I certainly apologize if there was a misunderstanding.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would ask your indulgence—the members have brought forward their case—if I would be allowed to submit something in writing to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. I really do take this one very seriously, and I would like to hear everyone's issues, please.

House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, Mr. Speaker, I plan to look into this matter further. I do, at the outset, express an apology to any members if there was a misunderstanding. Obviously, the intention was never to impede members in their work.

I ask your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, if I would be allowed to make a submission to you in writing, which, of course, I would copy to the other House leaders, on this point of privilege once we have all the details in place, so that we can fill you in on our perspective on this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Just to further this point of privilege, I want to concur that the events did, in fact, happen as Mr. Milligan has outlined.

We were going to another function with the whole intent, as we were invited by the consul to come back to the Greek community, and he was physically impeded. I think it was very deliberate. I think my esteemed colleague was recognizable as a member of opposition, and it was very deliberate and it was that way.

We chose, out of respect for this House, for the elected people and particularly for the day we were celebrating, not to make an incident of it that day, because we did not want to further tarnish the goings-on of that afternoon. But we do believe very strongly that it needs to be brought to your attention. We do believe we were—not only was it rude, but it was unacceptable behaviour. It was deliberate. It was very much, “You shall not come in here.” We were invited on the front lawn—we went out with our colleagues—the way it should have been, to come up to that reception, and I think it was very deplorable that we weren't allowed in there.

More concerning, I think, or perhaps equally concerning, is that the Greek community and those in my community and Mr. Milligan's might think that we did not wish to attend that gathering, that we did not want to bring our best wishes on behalf of our caucus and our colleagues. So I very much dislike that we were physically barred from going in there.

1350

It is my hope that you will rule that this was, in fact, a point of privilege. I would take up the House leader

across the hall—that not only would I like him to do an investigation and make an apology, but I would like that they extend an apology to the Greek consulate, advising that we wished to go and we were not able. We were, in fact, obstructed from being able to attend that function, which we were planning later on to go to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I had another incident that relates exactly to what these gentlemen were talking about—the members. When the Queen visited a year and a half ago, Mr. Bailey and I were also pushed aside by Liberal staffers and told to stand behind a fenced area, and the Liberal members were allowed to go and sit in privileged seating, so this is not a new thing, Speaker. I think it's an ongoing situation that certainly has to be addressed, and I'm sure you'll take the right, appropriate action on this. It's very, very troubling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further on the same issue? The member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just as the opposition House leader, I want you to know that the full force and effect and support of all of the members of the PC caucus are behind this complaint, the point of privilege. As Mr. Miller from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek just pointed out, and others are pointing out, this is becoming an epidemic around here, in terms of Liberal staffers and their high-handedness.

It does no good for the government House leader to say that perhaps that staffer had no intention of impeding a member's movement in the hallway. If you look at Speaker Peters's ruling of two years ago—almost two years to the day; two years to the occasion, it being budget day last year, and budget day is tomorrow—he ruled in favour of the point of privilege. It was referred to committee, and we had an opportunity to explore exactly what happened. The fact that the government said that they had no intention of delaying us on that day to come into this House to hear the budget I think he found to be irrelevant in his ruling, so I'd ask you to take that into consideration.

Secondly, I do want to also support the honourable member from Beaches-East York in terms of—you can imagine the embarrassment caused to the member, and to our members also, our members going to a different meeting. As he was making that point, the minister, Mr. Gerretsen, said, “Oh, I guess you guys didn't want to go to the Greek party.” It's exactly the point that was just made, in terms of the impression that might have been left by the incident to the Greek consulate and the guests that were there.

If other people on the Liberal side are thinking, “Well, maybe the Greek community will take this as a slight,” then I think it's appropriate that the honourable member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound also asked the government House leader to extend an apology to the Greek community and those that were assembled.

Mr. Speaker, not to belabour the point, but this is, as Yogi Berra would say, *déjà vu* all over again. It's what

happened in 2010. I was one of the ones who was impeded and almost late for the budget in this chamber. We had an opportunity, and we appreciated the opportunity at that time, by Speaker Peters to have a full airing, which is what we hope you will do today: Allow a full airing on this in one of the committees.

On that occasion, I remind you, it did some good. People got things off their chests, the OPP were able to explain what happened, and all was forgiven. To hear that it's happening again with Liberal staffers is unforgivable at this time, and I hope you'll give us a remedy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Hang on. There are rotations here, and I'm trying to make sure we all have an opportunity.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think there are three things that I want to add to this, as you think about—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Excuse me.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What do you mean? I can't speak? What's your problem?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the Chair, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: All right. No, I thought you were heckling me intensely on the other side of the House.

There are three points that I want to make here. The first point is that if the political staffer indeed did what is being said happened, which was to prevent a member from the assembly from freely walking in the halls to get to his or her office, to whatever meeting they were going to, clearly, that is out of order. It's not just a question of order; it's also a question of contempt, to a certain extent, because all of us, as members, have the ability to move freely within this building, to be able to do the work that we have to and that we've been elected to do, as representatives of those ridings. So the first part is, if there's an investigation, we need to clarify that. If the political staffer from the Liberal Party was trying to stop the members from freely travelling in the halls of this building, that is quite serious, and I think it's something we need to take a look at. And I think the point that the opposition House leader makes is important: that maybe there needs to be a bit of a hearing about this to find out exactly what happened.

The second thing I want to say is, it was really ill-advised, if the government decided to do what was essentially a reception to celebrate the Greek community of Canada, to do it strictly in their caucus room so that other caucus members could not be invited. I would ask that you maybe take a look at trying to give some guidance to government and opposition parties, if you're going to have such a thing that celebrates a community, that in fact you do it somewhere in a committee room where it is open to everyone.

We understand the process: The Liberal caucus room is the Liberal caucus room. If you want to invite me or you don't want to invite me in, that's your call—the same way as with mine or the Tory caucus room. But I think the issue here is, if we're going to have public celebrations on the front lawn, raising the flag and celebrating the Greek community of Ontario, I think the Speaker should look at giving some direction to the government and others when you're doing those kinds of things, that you don't make them invitation only. If you're inviting us to the flag-raising outside, certainly you've got to invite us to meet with the community, wherever that reception might be after. It would probably have been more appropriate if they had actually done it in a committee room and all of this would have been avoided.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, on a point of privilege: Some comments were attributed to me just now by the member from Simcoe–Grey. If I had any comments at all, I said exactly the opposite—exactly the opposite. The flag-raising was a public event, attended by members of all three parties. If there's a reception in this House—and I'm just speaking for myself at this point in time—all members should be invited there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the chorus here on this point of privilege raised by the member for Northumberland–Quinte West. Some of this may sound repetitive because my points have been made to some degree by the member for Timmins–James Bay. It is something that I thought we had taken care of a couple of years ago when a similar situation happened. I believe the member for York–Simcoe was one of them. It may have been the member for Whitby–Oshawa, too—

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Burlington, I think.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —Burlington and York–Simcoe who were denied access to an event, a very similar occasion like this.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, when we invite people from outside of this Legislature to an event and it is attended by members of the Legislature outside, then what kind of message are we sending if then there's an exclusive event held afterwards, for only members of one political party, where other members of the House do not have unfettered access to?

We, as members, are all equal. If you happen to sit on the government side, you happen to be on the governing side, and if you happen to sit in cabinet, you're part of the executive council. But we are all equal members of this Legislature, and our access here should be absolutely and totally unfettered.

While I know it is not my place to question the motives, and I'm not doing that, I would ask you to perhaps ask the questions. Why would an event that was public until noon or shortly after become a very political event? This was not a political ceremony. This was to honour Greek Independence Day, one that we all joined

in the celebration of, or those who had the opportunity—representatives of all political parties had the opportunity to join in that celebration, and they did thus. Why does it turn political afterwards?

You have to ask yourself, what is the motive of the governing party here in this House? I think that needs to be addressed, because things like this should not happen and cannot happen. Access to this building and anywhere in it is a matter of privilege of members of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, one last time.

Mr. Bill Walker: Just a point of clarification, again, to the Attorney General: I just want to clarify very clearly that the Greek consulate general extended an open invitation to everyone there to come in because the archbishop had not spoken on the lawn, and we had the privilege to be invited inside. So again, I find it doubly reprehensible that you would have a partisan event after that invitation is extended; and also, that you would actually put a directive out to staff. Obviously, staff had no choice to be able to defer that. They were probably only doing what they were told to do. So it's doubly reprehensible, especially when it was Greek Independence Day and the whole foundation of democracy.

Speaker, I hope you'll take that into consideration when you make your ruling.

1400

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank all the members for their contributions to this very serious situation, and let you know that I will reserve my ruling. I also agree to allow the government House leader to submit a written statement, as long as it's understood that it will be shared with the other House leaders to ensure that they have an understanding of what you're writing.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCEPTING SCHOOLS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 POUR DES ÉCOLES TOLÉRANTES

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 7, 2011, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui a trait à l'intimidation et à d'autres questions.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure, on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus, to speak to anti-bullying initiatives in Ontario, and in particular to the legislation placed before us.

I'd like to first start by welcoming Karen Strype and Gail Birkett from the Canadian Federation of University Women. They are here in support of the anti-bullying

coalition, a coalition I will be speaking about this afternoon.

An important topic of late, bullying has become further pronounced than it has ever been experienced by members of this chamber. Cyberbullying, text threats and the sad reality that today's bullying has taken on a greater severity and viciousness is evidence why this assembly needs to act, and to act in a decisive, holistic and non-partisan manner.

For some time now, several members of this assembly have drawn attention to the plight of bullied students and have proposed a variety of ideas that could bring awareness to bullying and also to prevent it. One member in particular who has devoted such energy is Elizabeth Witmer, the MPP for Kitchener–Waterloo. Mrs. Witmer is a former minister and critic of education, but she is also a former teacher and a former board chair. I would like to commend the member for her important and substantive work in anti-bullying initiatives in this House.

There are also a number of other Ontarians who have committed their attention to eradicating bullying. While it is impossible to mention all of them, let me share with you and with this House some of the initiatives that are occurring at a grassroots level. In Ottawa, Majic 100 FM has taken a leading role with their No More Bullies campaign. Led by on-air personalities Stuart Schwartz—known to most of us as Stuntman Stu—Trisha Owens and Angie Poirier, the No More Bullies campaign has been raising awareness in schools and through a rather unique outreach program. They have celebrities, pro athletes, politicians and everyday Ontarians write “No More Bullies” on their hand, take a picture of it with their face and stick it on a Facebook campaign so kids know there is support there.

By having Ottawa Senators' owner Eugene Melnyk, Canadian band Simple Plan, Canadian singing sensation Carly Rae Jepsen and even a few MPPs like myself and the member from Ottawa Centre participate, Stuntman Stu's team is telling students it is not okay to bully. It is not cool. But even more importantly, Mr. Speaker, Stu, Angie and Trisha are letting kids who are bullied know that they are not alone.

My friend Colin McSweeney often says of bullying, “We need to make bullying taboo and socially unacceptable the same way drinking and driving became intolerable 25 years ago.” That's exactly the type of activism that Stuntman Stu and his team are doing on-air and in Ottawa schools to end bullying.

Another group in Ottawa, the Bengals football team, is also thinking outside the box when it comes to bullying. They want to rehabilitate the bullies. Their Be a Bengal, Not a Bully program is smart, it's accessible and it's productive. The Royal Ottawa Hospital made them an Inspiration Award recipient for their program this past year. Let me read about this program:

“Since 2008, Bengal players, coaches, parents and managers have been united in their fight against bullying both on and off the field. This youth-led initiative brings the anti-bullying message to an ideal place for maximum impact—the football field.”

“The program began with a simple anti-bullying policy—developed and written by the young players themselves—and has since grown into a core component of the Bengal organization. Be a Bengal, Not a Bully identifies and supports leaders from within the team who participate as peer mentors for the program....

“For the Bengals, the message is clear: Bullying will not be tolerated.”

That’s impressive, given that it’s coming from young football players.

These are just two examples of anti-bullying campaigns in Ontario.

Parents and students have literally come together across the province and have created a vast network of support, awareness and lobbying. I would like to acknowledge a few of those, if I may: Lesa McDougall and Karen Cameron are the co-founders of Bluewater Citizens for Education; Corina Morrison is the co-founder of the London Anti-Bullying Coalition; Katie Neu is the co-founder of Bullying Canada; Karen Sebben is the co-founder of the York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition; and Anne Taylor is the chair of the St. Thomas/Elgin Anti-Bullying Coalition.

They have done outstanding work, pointing out the seriousness of bullying in our communities. Each of them has been directly affected by those impacts. Each of those who I mentioned today can speak to why Ontario needs a strong and comprehensive anti-bullying law that will complement the work they are doing on the front line.

Awareness isn’t enough anymore. I have come to learn that first-hand. It is not as simple to say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” That is facile, it is ill-informed and a poor excuse for turning a blind eye to the truth.

Let me read a headline from the Ottawa Citizen of October 27. For those at home and who are here today, listening to this debate, I just want you to know this will disturb you: “Jamie was forced to switch schools in grade 7, after a group of four or five students forced flashlight batteries down Jamie’s throat while they were on a school bus.” That’s not sticks and stones. It’s not name-calling. It’s torture; it’s torment. It’s unacceptable in a civilized society.

Those who think we needn’t enact legislation to protect Ontario students from this type of cruelty might be unaware that bullying has been a factor in some Ontario students and their decision to take their own lives as a result of bullying. Some students have chosen to die by suicide because they felt that the bullying would never stop—bullying, in these cases, so deplorable that the student bullied reaches the depths of despair and cannot see a better day.

That boy I just told you about, that had the batteries shoved down his throat, was Jamie Hubleby. Sadly, in Jamie’s case, it took his suicide for the bullying to stop. Jamie’s story has received international attention. I can tell you, Speaker, I will personally never forget learning—where I learned and where I was when I found out

he’d died. I think of him every time I see his mother and father. I felt, when he died, that there must be something I could do. I know I’m not the only one who feels that way.

Edmund Burke, the great British philosopher, once said, “All that is required for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.” Knowing what we know about Jamie’s tragic experience, the good people in this place cannot turn a blind eye to bullying. We cannot do nothing about this problem. We cannot ignore bullying in our schools and on our school buses. It is simply not an option.

I genuinely believe this House collectively wants to do something. How else to explain Bill 13 and Bill 14 being introduced on the exact same day by both the government and the opposition to eradicate bullying?

1410

It’s now generally accepted that there is a problem with bullying or, as Burke put it, an evil that we have to deal with. The question now becomes how we triumph or, in plainer terms, how we fix that problem. I’ve contemplated this very question in my mind countless times since Jamie died. I personally have gone through all the emotions as well. I’ve been angry, I’ve been sad, I’ve been shocked, and then I’ve been angry again. I’m angry because Ontario students can feel so isolated and distressed as a result of bullying in one of our public schools that he felt that there was no other avenue than to take his own life.

I have spoken a great deal about Jamie in this House, Mr. Speaker, to share his story and to remind Ontarians that bullying today has gone too far. An even more dreadful fact is that Jamie’s story is not the only one; it’s just the one that I know most personally because his parents are my friends. Mitchell Wilson was only 11 years old when he took his own life because he didn’t want to testify in court against his bully. According to durhamregion.com, Mitchell’s dad said he was taking one of the walks prescribed for his treatment of muscular dystrophy last November when he was mugged by an older boy, intent on taking an iPhone. The attack was the start of a downward spiral for Mitchell, who was bullied by other kids and fearful of having to go to court to testify. In words that can only be defined as heart-shattering, Speaker, Mitchell’s grandmother said this: “‘It isn’t OK to beat a little disabled kid and get away with it,’ a weeping Mrs. Wilson said. ‘It’s not right. It’s broken my heart to lose my grandson. He was my only grandchild and now he’s gone. It’s horrible.’”

Since being named PC education critic, I have encountered countless parents, some of whom I mentioned here today and all of whom have shared their personal stories of anguish, stories of how their children were beaten, berated and bullied because they were different—different. They were bullied because they were different. Each story has brought with it a “cause,” if you will, of why their son or daughter was bullied. Jamie was targeted because he was a figure skater. As he got older, it was because he questioned his sexuality. He was the

only openly gay kid in his school, so the bullies targeted him. In Mitchell's case he was bullied because he had muscular dystrophy. Speaker, my grandfather died of muscular dystrophy. I know how that disease can ravage your body while your mind is still there, take away your mobility and your ability to act. He could not defend himself from that cruel disease. This boy physically could not fight back. The physically weakest of the weak, bullied because he had a deadly disease.

Others are targeted because of a learning disorder or their weight. I've heard stories of kids being bullied because of their economic circumstances, mercilessly punished because the other kids considered them poor. Still others have been made fun of and intimidated at school because of their religion. Having faith in the Almighty should not be a reason in Canada for derision, contempt or mockery. But sadly, on our school grounds, it's as if anything can go. Bullying takes many forms, and there is not only one cause—an important point for us to remember throughout this debate.

Speaker, this brings me to the legislation before us. We know that on November 30 the Liberal government introduced Bill 13 and the PC opposition, of which I'm a proud member, through the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, introduced Bill 14. It was a significant day, in my mind. There was certainly consensus among legislators that bullying had reached a tipping point in Ontario and, further, there was agreement that something needed to be done. Before us were two bills—both different but, as I've said in the past, complementary, not competing. We had a golden opportunity in this minority Parliament to do something momentous.

We had an opportunity to put students first, not ideology. We could have done the right thing by bringing the best and brightest minds of this assembly together, while setting partisanship aside for the good and the safety of our students. We could have had the strongest anti-bullying legislation in North America, but sadly, I'm not so sure that can happen now. I dare say we missed a golden opportunity. I'm disappointed that the government was not confident enough in the good minds and ideas that this Legislature can bring to do the right thing, and that their insecurity of losing control of the agenda has gotten the better of them. I do believe Bill 14 is of higher quality than Bill 13.

On November 30, as the PC education critic, I said of Bills 13 and 14, "We will be serious about passing anti-bullying legislation, starting, of course, with Mrs. Witmer's" bill "and ending, of course, with the government's legislation, because we believe that measures included in both of those bills will make Ontario the leader in North America in anti-bullying legislation."

Further extending that olive branch, on December 1, I told the Ottawa Citizen, "We have offered to merge the two bills, and I am sure we'll merge them in committee. Everybody in the legislature is on the same page. There's merit in both bills and there's tremendous political will behind this. I support the Premier on this."

Perhaps I should have been clearer. I support the desire to eradicate bullying, but I also believe we must

take this task seriously. If we get this bill wrong, Speaker, the kids suffer. This isn't about headlines; it's about getting it right.

Listen to what Karen Sebben has to say—I introduced her earlier—from the York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition. This is her quote: "My son's three years of bullying took the form of homophobia. But as parents, it didn't matter to us what form the bullying took. The fact remains that aggression and assault were taking place regardless of the reason. This is the focus of any anti-bullying legislation and the PCs' Elizabeth Witmer got it right with Bill 14." A strong endorsement by Ms. Sebben of Bill 14, not Bill 13.

You're aware, Speaker, that I approached the government to have them seriously consider getting their bill right and using the minority Parliament to all of our advantage. We had the opportunity to do something revolutionary here by using obscure legislative tools to bring our biggest and brightest ideas together.

I have personally lobbied this government for months to pause second reading so we could create a process that would send both bills immediately to committee to merge. For months, I thought the negotiations were moving along. That was until late last week, when the government unilaterally put this bill on the table and on the order paper so we couldn't continue our negotiations.

Ontario students should have been given the confidence that this assembly could put them first and set aside partisan differences. I think it would have been a worthy exercise, one that could have produced remarkable results: tough anti-bullying legislation that would deal with bullying of all types and forms without the divisiveness of entrenched positions that are starting to take root.

Even parents and media commentators were cheering this idea along. I'm going to quote a few more people, Speaker. On March 6, the Toronto Sun's Moira MacDonald said about the bills, "Both had their merits—the Conservatives' Bill 14 Anti-Bullying Act, had a more all-encompassing focus on bullying compared to the Liberals' Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act.

"Nevertheless, even Premier Dalton McGuinty said there was an opportunity for both parties to work together on the final bill."

1420

Allan Hubley wrote in the Ottawa Citizen, "I have personally met with a number of MPPs from all parties and believe they want to work together to develop a final bill that will enable schools to accomplish real action on the anti-bullying issue.

"This can only happen quickly if all parties agree to send the government's bill to committee for discussion and revision, and to blend it with some good ideas from Witmer's bill."

In fact, this past December, Allan Hubley and his wife Wendy joined me at Queen's Park. They met with Dalton McGuinty and Tim Hudak, they talked to Peter Tabuns and Laurel Broten, and they shared stories with Christine Elliott and Elizabeth Witmer. The Ottawa Citizen said of

the day, "They also wanted to tell the Premier to start working with the other side on this issue.

"The kids are watching us," said Hubley. "This is important."

I agree with Allan Hubley. He has been a principal adviser to me on teenage mental health, youth suicide and bullying. If I may say, he and Wendy are two of the strongest, kindest and gentlest souls I have known in my life. They have put their own grief on the back burner so they can tell Jamie's story, because they don't want another family to go through the pain they are battling.

I don't want another family to go through the struggle that the Hubleys are facing. I'm certain that no one in this place wants another family to face the same sorrow that Allan and Wendy are feeling. Yet there are kids watching, and what they see is a Liberal government unwilling to admit they could have done better by working with others.

Imagine using the Liberal slogan "Going Forward Together." Those words could have been more than just catchy electioneering, and we could have presented to the public a first-class bill aimed at eradicating bullying of all kinds. Alas, it appears that sloganeering has won the day, Speaker, and I'm disappointed to say that we are debating an inferior bill to Mrs. Witmer's. Therefore, even when this bill does eventually go to committee, it is not likely to produce the type of protection Ontario students deserve because of the constraints of the legislative process.

This is where it becomes real; where the rubber hits the road, so to speak. Parliamentary procedure, I'm sure you'll be aware, really doesn't matter that much to moms and dads who are at their wits' end because their kids are being bullied and they're struggling with suicide. Parliamentary procedure means nothing to those people, Speaker, because they are going through something that only some of us here feel, and hopefully many of us won't ever feel, every day at our house. All they know is that they want their children protected. All the Hubleys want is their child back, and I'm certain they won't be able to understand why we couldn't break with parliamentary convention and work together and use a commonsense starting point.

I'm sure they won't be happy to learn that the minister was so entrenched in her own views. I'll even use the word: The minister was selfish not to accept that there are valid criticisms of her legislation, that there was a better way and that we could have worked together. We could have put partisanship aside. We could have improved her bill. But she was selfish.

I know they'll be utterly disappointed back home to know that if you disagree with even one "and" or "but" in the minister's bill, you'll be labelled a bigot or a homophobe—bullying, of course, at its finest. And I must say that members of this assembly have been targeted by that, because there are significant challenges to any piece of legislation where you will want to bring attention to those flaws and you will want to bring in amendments. All of us, regardless of party, could have given consent to

put a process together that works for those kids who are hurting, for those parents who are at their wits' end and for all of them who just want something done.

Mr. Speaker, let me read something that Anne Taylor recently wrote:

"We are calling on all parties to work together and take time for careful consideration over the drafting of a final bill. 'Bullying is abusive in nature and is a result of intolerance, inequity and misuses of power. In order to put an end to bullying and bullycide, we must use legislation to help build this framework. The language must be concise and specific regarding bullying and peer abuse. Our hope is to have a bill strictly devoted to anti-bullying for all students and to keep other issues of equality separate so that the bill's purpose is not distorted, making it about political reputations or narrowing the bullying focus ... instead of the safety and learning success of every single one of the children and youth in this province.'"

I consider Bill 14 to be the gold standard of anti-bullying legislation because it is devoted to the anti-bullying of all of Ontario's students. A comparison document done by Mrs. Witmer's office provides a detailed analysis of both 13 and 14, and it's clear that her bill is one that the Legislature should be passing.

Let me make this comparison, because I think it's extremely relevant to where myself and Mrs. Witmer are with respect to anti-bullying legislation.

Bill 14's definition of bullying is more thorough, focusing on what constitutes bullying and how it affects the victim. The Liberals' definition is preoccupied with the reason for bullying, whether it's gender, religion, or race, and does not place enough emphasis on the form or outcome of bullying. The Liberal definition focuses on the perceived power imbalance, based on the aforementioned individual factors. Our definition doesn't require specifically stating what the individual factors are, since it is designed and written to include all conceivable reasons one may be bullied. The PC definition includes the impact that bullying has on the school environment, the education process and the victim's emotional well-being. Our definition is longer, more detailed and therefore more comprehensive.

The PC bill includes a section devoted solely to addressing cyberbullying. This is critical due to the increasing prevalence of Internet-based bullying. The Internet allows perpetrators to relentlessly bully and harass their victims 24 hours a day, and often anonymously. The Liberal bill barely makes mention of cyberbullying, referring to it instead as an "electronic" form of bullying. Our bill prohibits the many different forms of cyberbullying: creating an anonymous Web page, impersonating another person, communicating material to more than one person, or posting material on an electronic medium that can be accessed by more than one person.

The Liberal bill requires school boards to issue bi-annual surveys to students in order to collect information on the efficacy of board policies and plans. The infor-

mation is solely for internal board use. Our bill, the bill submitted to this Parliament by Elizabeth Witmer, requires principals to track and to forward the number of bullying incidents that have occurred each year to their respective school board. The board is then required to compile this information in a yearly report and submit it to the ministry. The ministry will subsequently release this information in an annual report detailing the number of bullying incidents that have occurred provincially and what steps the ministry has taken to address bullying in schools. Our bill, the PC bill, recognizes that in order to make progress and improvements, the ministry and boards must have the necessary data.

A major component of our Progressive Conservative bill is accountability. The Liberals fail to address this in its entirety.

Our bill is much more robust in its requirement for the ministry and school boards to develop comprehensive bullying prevention plans. It requires the ministry to establish a provincial plan that will serve as the basis for each board's plan. The boards are mandated to develop their own plan and submit it to the ministry for approval. The bill stipulates what must be included in each plan. Bill 13, however, states that the minister "may" establish policies and guidelines with respect to bullying prevention, and I will touch on that a little bit later because it is an area of concern for many parents across Ontario.

1430

Let's continue to do this comparison. The Progressive Conservative bill requires principals to provide every student and parent and guardian with the board's prevention plan, as well as include the plan on the school website. The Liberal plan does not require that.

The PC bill formalizes a process for investigating allegations of bullying. It also stipulates the duties of the principal following an investigation in which bullying has been deemed to have occurred. The Liberal bill does not include anything similar to this.

The PC bill incorporates bullying prevention directly into the provincial curriculum, beginning in kindergarten and continuing throughout the elementary and secondary grades. This, Mr. Speaker, will enable the prevention of bullying. The Liberal bill, on the other hand, does not require this. Their bill focuses on discipline, which is reactionary and punitive, and from what we hear from parents, not workable.

Our stakeholders, including parents of bullied kids, do not believe in expulsion. They believe in rehabilitation, something I was talking about when I told you about the Be a Bengal, Not a Bully campaign that's happening in Ottawa to make sure that kids are learning bullying is not acceptable and violence in the schools is not acceptable.

The PC bill establishes mandatory remedial programs for perpetrators of bullying. They must be provided by boards and delivered by social workers, psychologists or other trained professionals. It also stipulates that these programs must be made available for victims, albeit on a voluntary basis. The Liberal plan does not require perpetrators to attend remedial programs. That means the

bully is still going to be out there without any necessary supports. It's problematic, Speaker.

I would like at this point in time just to say a special acknowledgment to a member of Elizabeth Witmer's staff, Dan Powers, for compiling those points for our caucus, who has taken a lot of his time to ensure that we got it right.

As Karen Sebben pointed out in yorkregion.com—and we've spoken about Karen before—"The York group, along with coalitions in St. Thomas-Elgin and London, Bluewater Citizens for Education and the youth-led Bullying Canada, released a statement this week raising 'grave concerns' over Bill 13.

"If anti-bullying legislation is to be effective, they say, it should be all-encompassing to include bullying by school staff as well as students and provide families easy access to information.

"Ambiguous, vague and unavailable bullying policies can allow administrators to diminish incidents, the release said."

Further on, it reads, "The group is asking all parties to leave politics at the door and work together, with input from victims and their families, to combine the Liberals' Bill 13"—with the Progressive Conservative Bill 14—"both tabled in December."

Now I've said many times in this House that if one student takes their own life, quits school or self-harms after we pass the bullying law, we will have failed. Here we have a credible and impartial parent group—a group of them, actually, parent groups—who have seen the effects of bullying first-hand, telling us in this chamber that Bill 13 is not as strong as Bill 14. They tell us that we need to check our politics at the door. In fact, Sebben's York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition has linked arms with several other parent groups that I mentioned earlier. They make critical arguments why Bill 13 is not as thorough as they would have hoped.

Now, allow me to read into the record, Speaker, excerpts of an open letter the group released earlier this month. I might add, before I read this into the public record, I did place a copy of this letter on the desk of the minister a few weeks back, and I do hope she took the time to read what this group has said. It is quite lengthy, so I will ask your indulgence as I read all of this information into the public record.

They start, "It is vital to the success of our education system and the well-being of generations of children and young adults to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying. Without informed decision-making and effective legislation, every Ontario student remains at risk....

"There are two bills tabled, two bills that have some good ideas, but two bills that don't go far enough. We beseech all to work together and take time for careful consideration over the drafting of a final bill because, once passed ... the government of the day can claim that there is no further need to look at bullying issues ... and that time is needed to see how effective the new legislation is ... and that will likely amount to years. The students of Ontario cannot afford to have any more

ineffective legislation passed. They cannot afford any further 'band-aid' approaches or 'wait and see' attitudes. Comprehensive and effective legislated changes to the Education Act are needed to ensure that this province is doing its very best to keep students safe in its schools. Bullying is abusive" and results in "intolerance, inequity and misuses of power. In order to put an end to bullying and bullycide, we must implement an anti-oppressive framework. If we are to use legislation to help build this framework, the language must be concise and specific regarding bullying and peer abuse. To integrate the problem of bullying with other school-based issues would, in effect, put the issue of bullying on the back burner yet again. Our hope is to have a bill strictly devoted to anti-bullying for all students and to keep other issues of equality separate so that the bill's purpose is not distorted, making it about political reputations or narrowing the bullying focus," as I stated earlier.

They go on to say: "It is vital to the success of our education system and the well-being of generations of children and young adults to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying."

Then they outline a number of initiatives that they're concerned about. One is "all-encompassing." "Any definition(s) related to bullying (Bill 14 has a thorough one; Bill 13 does not provide one) must be all-encompassing, pertaining to all members of school communities.... As victims and parents of victims," they say, "it doesn't matter what form bullying takes. Safeguards need to be written into the Education Act that would prevent students from being harmed by all acts of bullying, including, but not limited to, homophobic acts and even, and especially, those acts carried out by those in positions of authority. We will continue to seek this and ask for nothing less than legislation that ensures that our children's bullying experiences are never repeated."

Speaker, this is coming from concerned parents from across Ontario, from York region, from London, from Elgin-St. Thomas, from Kitchener. Right across this province, parents have banded together, with their own ideas, because they actually see this happening to their own children. They actually have had to deal with some of the repercussions that bullying has had in their own family, in their own schools, and they're telling us how to get this right.

They also say we need easy access to information. They say: "We have seen first-hand (and have been made aware of many other cases) how ambiguous, vague and, often, seemingly unavailable bullying policies, procedures and definitions allow administrators to diminish incidents and remove them from the realm of bullying altogether. Clear definitions are crucial and must cover all forms of bullying (Bill 14 covers some of this....)"—Bill 13, not so much.

They also talk about tracking and reporting, and I'm very proud that Mrs. Witmer has made a very important and dedicated addition to her bill to ensure that there is going to be tracking and reporting.

This anti-bullying coalition, that represents so many of our communities across Ontario, says: "All schools

should be required to keep a quantitative and detailed record of all reports of bullying throughout each school year. The public should, again, have ... access to the quantitative information, which should be broken down to clearly show:

"a) the total number of bullying incidents reported in a given ... year;

"b) the total number of reported incidents that, after investigation, were deemed to have been legitimate incidents of bullying;

"c) the total number of incidents that required disciplinary action;" and

"d) the total number of incidents that required legal intervention in any capacity."

1440

Now, as I have mentioned on a number of occasions, and in the spirit of the legislation introduced by Mrs. Witmer, this organization also believes in a very key and important point: There should be support for all. "Bills 13 and 14 both recommend offering support, assistance and remedial programs to both victims and aggressors. The damage caused by bullying is not, however, limited to the bully's chosen victim(s). It is far more wide reaching than that, as its effects are felt by family members as well.... Early intervention is critical in attempting to avoid the years of psychological damage that can follow ongoing bullying attacks. Time is of the essence when you are watching your child crumble and become suicidal."

Those are very important words from parents who are quite distressed. They believe there needs to be comprehensive policies for all school boards. "Bill 13 would seem to suggest that school boards must each establish their own policies and guidelines regarding bullying, prevention and intervention, and that these policies must be approved by the Minister of Education." Their concern in this open letter: "Inconsistent policies and guidelines in different boards across the province leads to confusion, mismanaged time and too little accountability. One overarching and comprehensive policy for all of Ontario" would be so much better.

Let me give you an example. Let me take you back to that quote of October 27, where I read to you about Jamie. Remember? The batteries? Jamie was going to one school at that time and his parents took him out of that school and put him in another school. In Ottawa, we have four different school boards. It is not impossible to see four different school boards have four different schools on the same street. Those four schools could end up having four different policies as a result of this minister's bill. Does that make any sense to you? It doesn't make any sense, and that's why Mrs. Witmer has a far superior bill.

This other group speaks to third party oversight as well. They say, "The vast majority of these lawsuits are centred on bullying incidents and inadequate responses to keep students safe." You can sense their frustration when you read their letters. "There is a clear need for third party oversight in order to hold school boards" account-

able. I would argue that could be the minister, if the minister was serious about getting this bill right.

They talk about integrity and responsibility: “Professional development programs on bullying must include information and instruction regarding incidents where teachers or administrators exhibit bullying behaviour toward students, as witnessed by other teachers. Reporting duties need to apply even if the bully is a teacher or fellow staff member.... There must be some form of legislation in place to protect teachers who come forward in order to protect victims of bullying or abuse at the hands of teachers.”

Then, their final point: “Absolute accountability.” Listen to this: “In reading over Bill 13, there is repeated use of the phrase, ‘The minister may....’ In our experience,” they say, “policies and procedures that incorporate the use of the word ‘may’ are virtually worthless to parents advocating for their broken children. The doors are left wide open for administrators to respond, ‘Well, we are not required to do “that,”’ and that is exactly what so frequently happens. When it comes right down to it, the phrase, ‘The Minister may...’ really means, ‘The school board likely won’t have to....’”

These parents are frustrated, and they’ve been asking this assembly to act for many years now. We now have that golden opportunity, and it has been squandered. We have a minority government; every single voice in this Legislature is now equal, and they can’t handle that to protect these children.

So, their letter concludes by saying this: “Although we would like to be optimistic about the possibility of positive change with the tabling of Bills 13 and 14, instead we are concerned that Ontario families are about to begin a lengthy period of time with no real improvement in the area of bullying prevention and no possibility for such.”

These points are a complete analysis, as I have said, done by a number of anti-bullying coalition organizations and parent groups and those who have been bullied across Ontario. They have been in the field for quite some time. They have credibility. The research that they have done and the expertise that they have brought to the table deserve to be listened to. They deserve to be heard, and it’s important that that experience has been because of themselves and their own children.

They are not the only ones who have weighed in. Several Osgoode Hall Law School, University of Toronto and even some University of Ottawa students from my hometown have written to this assembly with their concerns, too. Let me quote what they have said, because when these legal minds come and view legislation from this assembly, I think it’s incumbent upon all of us to listen to what their criticisms might be:

“While we commend the goal of Bill 13 insofar as it addresses the need to eradicate bullying, we are concerned with the method and scope of this bill in attempting to achieve ‘bullying prevention and intervention.’ While bullying can single out traits such as race or sexual orientation, bullying is not limited to students displaying

such traits—rather, any and all students may become targets, whether for the size of one’s body, for shyness or for any other characteristic. Legislating that school boards empower only those students who lead clubs from one of four explicitly protected groups—gender equality, anti-racism, respect for students with disabilities, and sexual orientation—sends the message that some grounds for bullying merit more attention and protection than others. Consequently, the scope of the bill is too narrow and exclusive to promote true equity for all potentially targeted traits and identities. Moreover, the bill is silent on character development and on creating a safe environment for speaking about bullying.”

They further say—and these are students at various law schools throughout the province of Ontario. I will reiterate: They are from Osgoode Hall Law School, the University of Toronto and from the University of Ottawa. “The bill’s section on disciplinary measures similarly gives explicit attention and protection to issue-specific causes. Section 4(2) lists the general term ‘bullying’ along with ‘sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia.’ Sex and gender-related issues are not the only motives behind bullying or violent behaviour....” So that is interesting. They say finally, “We suggest that such licence may alienate or marginalize students whose conscientious beliefs may not align with the dominant views of school boards about what merits punitive sanctions.”

It’s interesting, but they’re not alone. There are still groups that have come out, including one of the largest teachers’ unions in all of Ontario, ETFO. They have written to Mrs. Witmer to express some support for her legislation, and I will read into the record this—and I know my time is getting down there: “Given the increase in reports of serious student bullying, including bullying that has led to students committing suicide, it is no coincidence that there are two bills before the House seeking to strengthen public schools’ capacity to address serious anti-social behaviour on the part of students. In its analysis of Bill 13, this submission will also make reference to specific provisions of Bill 14, the Anti-Bullying Act, 2011, sponsored by MPP Elizabeth Witmer. There are aspects of this private member’s bill that would strengthen the framework for responding to incidents of bullying and should inform amendments to Bill 13.”

As a mom, I want to see strong anti-bullying legislation pass this Legislature. But as the coalition has said, Bill 13 will not solve the problems. It will not give us the desired results. For that reason, both emotionally and intellectually, I don’t feel I can support the Liberal bill at this time. Will that change at committee? As hopeful as I am, Speaker, I am not optimistic; in fact, I’m a realist. Having negotiated with this Liberal Party for the past number of months to try and put kids and their protection first at the expense of partisanship, I’ve now seen what they’ve done. I’ve now seen them unilaterally call this bill while we in the official opposition believed that the negotiations were still ongoing to put the very good ideas

of Mrs. Witmer into that bill. As we have seen today, there are a number of other ideas that have come from across the province from people who are desperate, who need our help, who want us to work together so that we can end bullying in our schools. They wanted us to do that together.

I don't see Bill 13 as being particularly relevant to students in every case, and without Mrs. Witmer's bill fully included in Bill 13, this bill is incomplete. It's an incomplete bill that will not solve all of the bullying-related problems that Ontario students are confronted with.

Yet if Bill 13 does pass, the Liberals will claim that they have acted, that they have done everything, that they are going to eradicate bullying in Ontario. They are going to pat themselves on the back, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to be proud of themselves. It will be a wonderful day to be a Liberal in Ontario. Yet the problem for them will be that if we fail one more kid in this province after we pass their bill and they didn't get it right, it will be a very big problem, not just for them but for all of us. I have said from the get-go, including earlier in these remarks, that if one more kid commits suicide, self-harms or drops out of school because of bullying, we will have failed.

I'm not interested in the back-patting competition of this Liberal government. I think we can do better. We must remember why we are here: to make Ontario a better place for all Ontarians—not just some, but all; not just the strong, but also the weak; not just the straight, but also the gay; not just the thin, but also the smart; not just the weak in learning abilities, but also those people who are working hard; not just for the overweight; not just for the learning-disabled. We have to protect all Ontarians, regardless of why they're being bullied. That is our job. That is why we were sent here. We cannot continue to have any more of these problems in our schools. That is the issue.

That is why we believe, on this side of the House, that we could have done something remarkable with each of our equal voices here. Instead, this is a government so focused on controlling the agenda that they gave up a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. They squandered an ability to take all of the good ideas and put them together. They chose to make a splashy headline at the expense of kids.

I'm utterly disappointed, and I'm very disappointed that they broke faith with this House on this bill. But, Speaker, this isn't the first time. They've done this before—not exactly this way. But let's go back a week ago when this assembly decided to vote for a select committee to investigate Ornge. This House stood and passed a motion to review what happened at Ornge. We've been asking for that minister to step aside. We wanted someone to be accountable. So just like this bullying bill where they were negotiating and they broke the negotiations, they've also broken faith with this House.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Ms. MacLeod has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All of those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1454 to 1524.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the members please take their seats.

Ms. MacLeod has moved the adjournment of the House. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing so that they can be counted by the table staff.

Take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing so that they can be counted by the table staff.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 29; the nays are 39.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

I now return to the member for Nepean–Carleton, who still has the floor.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I truly do appreciate the opportunity to have participated in this debate.

I do understand that the former Minister of Community Safety, who used to be in charge of protecting kids in this province, is heckling me over an important bill that people want to have their say on. My understanding is that we have an ability to debate this piece of legislation. If that Liberal government didn't want to have to deal with 30-minute bells and delays, then they should call a select committee and they should put Bill 13 and Bill 14 in committee together.

But what are they going to do instead? Instead, what they're going to do is heckle, drown us out, shout down the opposition, because Dalton McGuinty thinks he's got something called a major minority—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I do appreciate to talk about this important issue. It's one that I've raised on several occasions. I hear the little chirpers over there. They weren't here for the hour in which I discussed how important passing effective anti-bullying legislation was. They didn't hear the voices that I brought to this chamber on behalf of the parents in York region, in London-St. Thomas, in areas across the province like Kitchener and Ottawa, who are concerned about this issue.

I'm going to conclude today—I have about five minutes left—by reading something from Allan Hubley.

"This is one issue where partisan politics and special interest agendas should not get in the way of the ultimate goal: protecting kids from bullying. Personally, what I

want to have in the final bill and what I believe every parent in Ontario can support is as follows:

“Support for student-led initiatives is the key to giving kids the ability to help each other. My son Jamie wanted to start a club where every child who felt out of place could join and gain peer support. He talked about tall, short, thin, fat, and kids with freckles who would benefit from a safe place to be and the acceptance by others. My son said that this club would help kids learn to accept the differences in each other.

“Politicians need to forget about trying to name the groups that may form in schools. My son Jamie said kids today don’t like labels” like that “anyways.”

We want to memorialize children who have taken the ultimate step that we don’t want them to take. Speaker, we have to work together.

I said we must remember why we are here: to make Ontario a better place for Ontarians—not some but all; not just the strong but also the weak; not just the straight but also the gay; not just the thin nor the smart but the overweight and learning disabled.

Speaker, my favourite hymn in church—and I don’t get there very often because when I get home on Saturday and Sunday, I do spend it with my daughter. But I do have a favourite hymn. I looked it up—I Googled it—because I didn’t know all the words. It’s called *Hope is a Star*. It says, “The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.”

Please remember that’s our task. It is to make sure Ontario students, when they go to school, aren’t afraid. As my friend Allan Hubley has said to us on a number of occasions, the kids are watching us. Let’s get this right.

Let’s adjourn debate. Let’s put these two bills into committee. Let’s renegotiate. Why did they walk away? Is it the same reason they walked away from having a select committee on Ornge? Is it the same reason that they can’t give up control: because of their so-called major minority? I am disgusted and I will move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Ms. MacLeod has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1531 to 1601.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the members please take their seats.

Ms. MacLeod has moved the adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing while they’re counted by the table.

Thank you very much.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while they’re counted by the table.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 33; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

I again return to the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to continue debate.

For those members who are staying seated, I don’t have any more opportunities to call you on not calling a select committee, so there won’t be another 30-minute bell.

However, I do know that there will be other members of the Progressive Conservative caucus that will continue to call for a select committee in the House, given the issues that have surrounded the scandal on Ornge.

Mr. Speaker, we’re going to continue to call—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I can’t believe they’re actually protesting us protesting them for not getting that minister to resign and calling a select committee on Ornge. That is disgusting. That government has lost its way and needs to fire the minister and call a select committee.

But let’s get back to the matter at hand, Mr. Speaker. They also need to merge Bill 13 with Bill 14, and any absence of that means this caucus will not support their bill.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask all members to refrain from banging their hands on the desks. The Speaker has to be able to hear the member who has the floor.

Questions and comments?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I’m happy to be able to respond to the MPP for Nepean–Carleton. I’ve had some extra time to think about my response during the past hour as the party opposite chose to adjourn this debate twice. I thought about all the things we could have said to kids who are being bullied at school. So I’ll take my two minutes to say some of those things to kids now: We support you; we believe in you, no matter what your religion, race, gender, disability, culture or sexual orientation, no matter if you’re gay, bi, lesbian, transgender or queer.

The Accepting Schools Act is about getting all kids the supports they need to succeed in school, about making every school in this province a place where every kid feels welcome and respected. The Accepting Schools Act takes a whole-school approach, from a public education campaign to increased youth mental health resources.

Mr. Speaker, I remain deeply committed to passing Bill 13 in this House as soon as possible and to making each and every school in Ontario an accepting school, and I remain open to working with my colleagues in the opposition to take all the best ideas out there to make that happen. But, Speaker, when we are privileged to serve in

this House, we should spend our time thinking about the kids we are privileged to serve, and I would invite the members opposite to take the next period of time to think about the kids in every school across this province who are worried about how they are treated, who don't feel safe and accepted in their schools, who are not welcomed in the environment they are in. Speaker, I would say that the Accepting Schools Act is an important step forward, to be able to say to every child in every class in every school in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We should say to every child in every school in Ontario that they will be accepted in their school, they are accepted in their province, we believe in them and on this side of the House we will continue to work hard in that regard.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I did listen very carefully to what the Minister of Education just said with respect to my colleague's comments. And what's most disappointing is that they can never accept—either the minister or this government—that anybody but them ever has any good ideas. The reality is that there were two very good bills that were being brought forward here, Bill 13, and Bill 14, which was brought forward by my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. Both of them have merit, and we initially entered into discussions about how we could merge these two bills, how we could take the best of both of them.

But you don't want to listen. In fact, the minister wasn't even here for the points that were made by my colleague the member for Nepean–Carleton, who made some very valid points about the need to listen, the need to protect all of the children, to listen to the kids, that everybody's watching—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would say to the member for Whitby–Oshawa that it's inappropriate to make reference to the absence of any member.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker.

The reality is that both of these bills, Bill 13 and Bill 14, were brought forward in this Legislature on the very same day. We thought we entered into good-faith negotiations with the government on ways that we could explore how we could put these two bills together and get the best of both bills.

But I really feel, Mr. Speaker, that they led us down the garden path. They never really intended to have any serious discussions about how we could merge these bills. They just wanted to drag it out, and now they're forcing us to choose one bill over the other, which completely negates the purpose of this exercise in the first place, which is to get a bill that is going to protect all children so that all children, regardless of the reason they're being bullied, can feel safe and secure in their schools, and their parents can know they can send them to school every day knowing that they will be safe and

secure. That's what we on this side of the House are intending to achieve. That's why we want to talk about the merits of each bill. We believe that Bill 14, which has been brought forward by my colleague, is the more comprehensive bill, and that's what we'll be supporting.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I can see how this is a very sensitive bill because of the emotions from both parties that have been commenting and making their presentations on this bill today. But one thing that I would caution that we all have to remember is how we debate this bill in this House so that we set the examples, as adults, of how our children should behave when there are disagreements. Regardless of what your point of view is on the bill, there has to be a respect for other people's opinions, whether they agree or disagree.

Bullying is one of those forms that can take verbal. Let's remember in this House, please, no matter what bill we are debating, I personally believe that being respectful and considerate and open-minded, and listening to each other's opinion—you may not want to adopt it or listen to that or agree with it, but in the end this House is supposed to be impartial, as far as I'm concerned, to debates so that we all can create the best bill. Whether it be this Accepting Schools Act, Bill 13; whether it be bill G20; whether it be bill G34, we need to keep an open mind.

If you're going to have a government that's going to work for the best interests of everyone—children, seniors, anyone—we have to remember that the debating process must and should remain respectful. We are all adults here, so please, let's be respectful of that and set an example for all of our children.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There's time for one last question or comment.

Hon. John Milloy: You know, listening to the debate this afternoon reminds me of a piece of advice I got before I came to Queen's Park, after I had been elected. Someone said to me, "You're going to go to Queen's Park and you're going to have a lot of discussions about education," because education is, of course, central to provincial responsibility. They said, "Be very careful, because it only seems that when you're in a government setting or a Queen's Park setting"—and they certainly weren't being partisan—"you can talk for hours and hours and hours about education and the word 'student' never comes up."

What I think has shocked me the most about this afternoon is—and I give the member credit, she started off her speech talking about bullying, talking about students. Then all of a sudden, we had two recesses to waste an hour of valuable debate time when we could be talking about it. I've heard from across the way that we need a committee on Ornge or we need a committee on this or a committee on that. In effect, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is trying to hold hostage the fact that we want to move ahead with a piece of legislation which is going to benefit students here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of discussion about bill—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to say to the opposition members, the government House leader is six feet away from me and I can't hear him. I would ask you to refrain from heckling him and allow him to resume his comments.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of discussion about both Bill 13 and Bill 14. As I have said publicly on many occasions, the Minister of Education has said that there are good things in Bill 14, and we look forward to debate and discussion here in the Legislature and then in committee, where we have said we will have a great deal of openness to enhancing Bill 13 by taking what is best from Bill 14 and reconciling the two together. We've had a number of discussions with the opposition on ways to move forward. Quite frankly, there has been no real interest on the part of the opposition of having a pre-commitment, so there's no shame in moving ahead in second reading, which is what we're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member from London–Fanshawe, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Community and Social Services who acts as the Liberal House leader, as well as to my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa.

It is a shame that at the time that I gave my hour-long speech on bullying and talked about constructive not only processes, but ideas, actual contents on the bill, that the minister wasn't able to listen to that first-hand. It's a shame during that hour-long debate when we were standing here talking about some of the things we could have done right had she not been so selfish—she would have learned a thing or two. I've said over the hour—and I'll send the transcripts to the minister—that I don't see Bill 13 as being particularly relevant to all students in every case. That's why we had, for months, pressured them and negotiated with them to try and come to an agreement on process.

I want to give compliments and constructive support to the people that were around that table in the parliamentary liaison working group. I believe, genuinely, that they wanted something to work.

As I've said in the past, and I've said it two or three times in this debate, if the minister would like to hear it: If one more kid self-harms, commits suicide or quits school as a result of bullying, she will have failed. It is up to her. She has an opportunity to get it right; she chose not to.

With respect to ringing the bells, it is consistent with our displeasure over this government ignoring the repeated calls to call this government into account for an egregious scandal, where they wasted almost \$1 billion, not once, but this is now the second time—after eHealth, they brought us Ornge.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has decided to thumb their nose at this very Legislature, and this opposition will not allow that to continue any longer. We will fight them every step of the way. We'll continue to be the voice of the people, and we're going to continue to challenge them. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to remind all members that they need to focus their comments on the issue that is being debated, this Bill 13. I would caution all members, and encourage them to confine their comments to Bill 13.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise today to speak to Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act. Before I go to my remarks, I want to comment on some of the remarks made by the member from Nepean–Carleton. I have to commend her for speaking eloquently about the terrible realities that many students have faced and are living with today. Bullying is a very ugly thing; it's something that destroys lives. Her remarks and her passion fit the scale of the problem that we face.

In the course of my speech, Speaker, I will be talking about agreements that we in the NDP have with Bill 13, put forward by the government, and Bill 14, put forward by the opposition.

I want to say, however, Speaker, before I get into the body of my speech, that I send my thoughts to the family of Jamie Hubley, who Lisa MacLeod spoke so movingly about. His tragic death is, in part, the reason that we are debating this matter today. My hope is that his death, and the deaths of others before him, will not have gone in vain.

There are a variety of issues on the table here, and many of them profoundly difficult for all of us to come to grips with. Almost everyone has been bullied at some point in their life, and so when you come to this issue, it's not with a clean slate, it is not with an absence of emotional baggage—no, it comes as a charged issue. We come with those emotions, those memories, that history, and we come with the concerns we have for our children.

We're not talking about things here. We're not talking about objects. We're not talking about furniture. We are talking about our children, our flesh and blood, and our fears for them and our concerns for their safety, for their well-being, for the kind of lives that they will live or be deprived of, because we know that they can be hurt, physically and mentally; they can be damaged for a lifetime; they can lose their lives.

One word—bullying—in fact covers a range of issues. I will not spend an hour going into all the different ways that one can approach this, but I'll try to address two separate poles. One is the question of individuals who are bullies, and behaviour by individuals that is bullying.

The member from Nepean–Carleton may correct me. I may have misinterpreted, but I would say that the focus of her thinking and her analysis is, that is the primary problem, the central issue, that we have to come to grips with in this society.

We know that there are individuals who use their physical strength, their emotional skills to damage others.

They will do it through blows, they will do it through words, and in these days, with electronic technology available to us, they will be able to spread their words, their concerns, their rumours and their damage around the whole world, Mr. Speaker.

1620

Sometimes the anger of those individuals comes from the anger already in their lives, the frustration in their lives. Sometimes there are more complicated emotional or mental health issues at play. But the impact of their playing out that anger and frustration on others can be devastating.

In the time since these two bills were introduced, I have had the opportunity to talk with parents and read emails and letters from parents and families around this province, stories of young children dealing with sickness who were abused badly in their school grounds; of children suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder who had difficulty fitting in with the class, had difficulty dealing with teachers, had difficulty when, on top of the problems they were already dealing with, they were yet again set upon; of parents who despaired about the future of their children who were going to have to go through psychological counselling just to get through the normal life of a teenager that we are all familiar with. That individual bullying and its fallout is profoundly significant and has to be addressed.

There's also, Speaker, group bullying, where one child or a small number of children is excluded and abused by a larger number of children. Children pick up attitudes around them: sexism, racism, homophobia. They listen to their parents at home. They watch television. They listen to the world of adults, and they carry those attitudes forward with them. It shapes the way they deal with the other children that are in their lives. Our schools and the society within our schools reflect the larger society that those schools exist in. They are not separate and apart.

Here I think is where we would differ with the Conservatives most profoundly: We see bullying not just as a problem of individuals, but a cultural problem. If we look at the history of our culture and our society as we have gone through the struggles for emancipation of women and the establishment of their independence and the attitudes that we had to deal with and, frankly, unfortunately, still have to deal with; if we look at the history of racism globally, but on our continent, some of the terrible things that have been done, supported not just by a few individuals but broadly within the culture, we know that if we want to deal with bullying, if we want to actually have safe schools, not only do we have to deal with those individuals whose anger and frustration comes out in damage to the children around them, but we have to deal with a culture that in itself has problems and a culture that has to be changed.

Speaker, when children are exposed to bigotry at home, they don't just throw it off when they go to school. If you have a child who comes from a home that is financially well off but emotionally impoverished, that weight does not drop from their shoulders in the school

bus. If children come from a family in crisis, they carry that through the whole day.

I want to tell you a story, Speaker. I want to tell you a story about my experience as a child growing up in Hamilton. I went to Holy Family school on Kenilworth in the east end of Hamilton. I remember our principal coming into our class when I was in grade 3. You think about it: I was eight years old, so to have a clear memory from that time, it must have been pretty impressive.

The principal came in to speak to us because there was a new kid in our class midway through the school year, a kid called Joe, and he was being harassed mercilessly. His vulnerability was that he was new. He had no friends who would stick up for him. He was picked on because he had glasses, and as I remember it, kids who had glasses were regularly beaten up for wearing glasses. Sounds bizarre, but bullying has very little to do with the actual realities of a situation. It has to do with the dumping of prejudices, angers and frustrations on others.

Joe's mother had called the school and said at that her son was finding it incredibly difficult to come in to school, because every day he was picked on by a large group of kids in that class.

Our class was called in to a meeting with the principal. Holy Family school was run by—you know, as a kid, I never thought about the structure. A nun was the principal, and she was one tough nun. She came in. She said to us, "What you as a class are doing with this child, this kid, is unconscionable. That's not the way we raise you. That's not the way we teach you. Do you know how hurt this boy is?"

She was severe. She made it very clear that she had no time for behaviour that would leave a child crying in her hallways. She took on the responsibility of changing the thinking in that class. She tried to change the culture in that class, and in fact, she had a real impact. I don't think I'm exaggerating to say that, if she was not the voice of God, we knew that she had a direct connection, and we were not going to mess with her.

I have to say that that problem may be far away in time in my life, but when I talk to teenagers in my riding, when we talk about who gets bullied, the most likely victims are those who have newly transferred into a school. They don't have a network of friends; they are easily isolated; and that kind of behaviour and treatment continues on.

I wish it wasn't the case, but children have to learn kindness. They have to learn how to respect others. They have to learn that cruelty has consequences, because unfortunately, although we're born with the ability, we aren't given, at birth, empathy and respect. As we go through the process of life and learn empathy and respect—all of us—we learn that we can't take out our anger on others without there being substantial consequences. We have to learn that because a person looks or acts differently, that's no reason whatsoever to treat them badly. Because a person belongs to another group, it's no justification for taking out your anger on them.

That means that those in authority—and this chamber has substantial authority in this province—have to make

it very clear that respect and caring are core values of our society and need to be represented at every level and in every sphere of this society.

There are a number of issues that have to be addressed to get at the roots of bullying in our schools. We have to teach our children empathy, respect and self-understanding so that they don't take out their anger on someone who had nothing to do with causing that anger or damage to them in the first place. We have to identify and help those children who are particularly in trouble, who are particularly prone to lashing out and dumping their anger on others. We have to address those children, and that means putting resources into schools and addressing the larger social problems that create anger, frustration, despair. We have to teach people that differences between people—differences of religion, of ethnic background, of income, of gender, of gender identity, of looks, abilities or disabilities—are irrelevant when it comes to treating people with respect, to accepting them as fully human.

1630

We have to address those individuals who are the most destructive, but we also have to address those cultural norms that say that it is acceptable to abuse someone because of something inherent in their biology or their life. That has to be addressed, taken on.

I say all of this as a preamble to talking about the bill itself. In summary, the bill aims to create safer and more accepting schools by designating a Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week; requiring school boards to support student activities that promote equity; suspending or expelling students who engage in repeated bullying or hate-motivated actions; and requiring groups using school property to adhere to a code of conduct.

Given what I said in my opening remarks, this bill is a partial response to the issues that we're facing. And as I will make clear—because we're dealing with under-resourced schools—there's a lot that will need to be addressed beyond the bill itself if we're going to make the kind of difference we all want to see in this province.

What's the situation we face in Ontario? The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario that the member from Nepean–Carleton referenced earlier has said, and others have said, that bullying is prevalent in Ontario schools. It can compromise school success, contribute to low self-esteem, contribute to depression, delinquency and even suicide. In order to respond, we need to go from a base set of principles—principles that every student has the right to a learning environment that's safe, secure, free of intimidation.

We fully support effective action to ensure the safety of every student in the province of Ontario, so that no student is afraid in the morning when they get up to go to school. They may be worried about a test—that's life; they may be anxious about a trip—okay; but they shouldn't have to worry about their safety.

Effective prevention of bullying requires a comprehensive approach, including clear and consistent consequences, awareness-raising in class, awareness-raising in

the community, adequately resourced student supports, and meaningful student, parent and community engagement.

Bill 13 ramps up the consequences for bullying, but only partially supports student-led equity and awareness activities, and does not address other factors which are undermining school safety, including lack of timely access to professional supports, lack of timely access to treatment and alternative programming for at-risk or special-needs students, inadequate staffing and funding for anti-bullying programs, growing inequities between schools, the lack of social skills building opportunities, and a curriculum increasingly focused on narrow EQAO outcomes.

Let's just look a bit at the history here. Between 2005 and 2010, the McGuinty government passed two bills and issued various policies aiming to improve school safety, requiring school boards to take a range of actions, including developing policies on homophobia and gender-based violence, supporting student participation in gay-straight alliances and other student-led activities, supporting victims of serious incidents, ensuring schools work with professional agencies and have school-wide discipline policies, providing training for teachers and non-teaching staff, and monitoring and reviewing effectiveness of board policies through school climate surveys.

Bill 13 is supposed to be the next step after that. It's supposed to strengthen action to address homophobia, gender-based violence and discrimination by:

- creating a legal obligation for school boards to prevent bullying, engage in progressive discipline and support equity and inclusive education;

- requiring school boards to set goals and plans to promote positive school climate and prevent bullying in their multi-year plans; conduct school climate surveys every two years; support student activities and organizations to promote gender equity, anti-racism and respect for people with disabilities;

- requiring principals to expel a student who engages in bullying if a repeat offence and presence creates an unacceptable risk; suspend a student who engages in hate-motivated bullying;

- increasing the flexibility of reporting of suspendable behaviours; for instance, allowing clinical staff to work with students who have an addiction problem as long as there's no risk to the other students;

- designating the third week of November as Bullying Awareness Week.

As I said in my preamble, we have real concerns about the bill; first of all, with regard to resources and supports. This bill ramps up punitive measures—that is, automatic suspensions—without providing the resources and supports needed to prevent bullying in the first place.

Speaker, I had an opportunity in the last month or month and a half to talk with a group of high school students in my riding, and go through some of the elements in this bill and talk about suspensions. One thing that was striking to me was their opinion that for many

students who were disruptive, a suspension was not seen as a punishment but as a holiday. They didn't have a lot of confidence in suspension—and I understand that if you're dealing with a bully, having that bully out of the building is a real benefit. But those students, my high school students, said that if you're going to deal with those disruptive kids, you actually need the resources. They need counselling. They need other social supports. They saw intense work with those bullies as far more effective than simple suspension.

I want to note that not just the experts who were high school students in my riding, but others, emphasize the need to go beyond discipline: "Making headway on issues of safety involves abandoning the failed philosophy of addressing safety through discipline/enforcement mechanisms. It does not work. While there will always be a place for discipline in identifying standards of behaviour, the reality that has thus far not been accepted in the system is that marginalized youth cannot be punished/suspended into becoming engaged...."

"Hope needs to be restored through programs and initiatives that create prospects for success for youth who are currently on the outside looking in."

That's from the executive summary of the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, published by the Queen's Printer for Ontario in 2008.

It has to be recognized as well—my colleague from Kenora–Rainy River pointed this out—that expulsion and suspension are very blunt tools indeed when you're dealing with northern ridings, where the high school you're dealing with may be the only one for 250 kilometres. There's not the option, in practical terms, of moving someone from one school to another to try to break up a bad dynamic. The member from Kenora–Rainy River made it very clear to me that what she very much needed to see was investment in school resources to deal with students who are clearly acting out. Speaker, the bill does nothing to address inadequacy of staffing and supports for students at risk of bullying or who are victims of bullying.

The other side of the coin—again, talking to the high school students in my riding, who have said that when you are victimized by bullying, when you are dealing with intense personal interactions, so often they can't get the support in the school that they need to get through those problems. We need the resources to deal with those who are marginalized and disruptive, and we need the resources to deal with those who are the victims of that acting out. This bill is not going to address those resources, Speaker, and thus those fundamental problems are going to be left untended to.

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According to People for Education, despite new investments over the past few years—are you raising a question, member?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I do. I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I apologize, and I apologize to my friend for interrupting, because I think he's speaking along the line—if I could just have permission to briefly introduce our delegation from Saudi Arabia, from King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals. They've come all the way from Saudi Arabia. They're visiting here today.

I want to thank my friend from Toronto–Danforth both for his comments, because I think they're right on the nose, and also for his kindness in allowing me to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We extend our welcome to the delegation from Saudi Arabia.

I now return to the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Murray, you're forgiven. Guests from Saudi Arabia, my welcome. The government may tell you everything has been dealt with, but I'll tell you, as a member of the opposition, not true.

According to People for Education, despite new investments over the past few years, the role of principals, which has expanded from numerous government directives, has found us in a situation where fewer schools have principals. Sure, they've got more tasks assigned to them to deal with the problems we have, but if the principals aren't there, the problems aren't going to be addressed.

Special-needs students at one in three elementary schools in the GTA are not getting the recommended level of support. If that's true in the GTA, what's the case in Welland, in London–Fanshawe, in Timiskaming?

Speaker, we already face a shortfall of the staff that we need to address safety in our schools. More and more schools rely on fundraising for adequate playgrounds and school sports, meaning there's a growing gap in amenities and opportunities. We face significant physical problems in our schools, ones that need to be addressed. One in three schools outside the GTA has 10 or more ESL students but no ESL teacher. Students in most high schools don't have regular access to psychologists or youth workers. Three quarters of elementary schools lack supports needed to provide provincially mandated daily physical activity.

Speaker, this bill will not address those shortfalls, and, as my colleague from Welland has remarked to me before, if in fact the Drummond report goes forward, we'll see an even greater lack of supports in those schools. You can't talk about safe schools, no matter how beautiful a bill, without putting the actual resources in the schools themselves.

In 2008, the safe schools action team stressed that the Ministry of Education had to provide adequate resources for intervention strategies, and the Falconer report was clear about the resources that schools needed: increased supervision of playgrounds and halls; community outreach workers to build links with the community; support services such as social workers and child and youth workers.

Given the context of the underfunding that I've just outlined, the proposed funding associated with this bill—

\$18 million over three years—is clearly entirely insufficient. Eighteen million dollars over three years is \$6 million a year right across the province. Let's face it: The Toronto District School Board is looking at an \$85-million deficit and layoffs of hundreds of staff. Six million dollars per year for the whole province is not adequate to provide the real resources in our schools to make sure they're as safe as our children and our families deserve.

The Falconer report recommended an increase in benchmark costs for all components of the funding formula to close the gap between funding and actual costs, an increase in the demographic component, designations—"sweating" I believe is the technical term—to ensure it goes to programs addressing socio-economic factors, and a reconstitution of the local priorities amount. Clearly, Speaker, if we're going to have safe schools, we have to fix the funding formula, something that was promised by the McGuinty government for 2010, and we're waiting. Something was promised to make our schools safer.

With regards to curriculum, in 2008 the Safe Schools Action Team consultations "overwhelmingly confirmed that the most effective way to enable all students to learn about healthy and respectful relationships is through the school curriculum." That has not been done.

Moreover, Speaker, increasingly the emphasis on standardized testing, the EQAO results, as the primary measure of success in schools means that teachers are spending more and more time teaching to the test and are less able to promote team-based and student-centred learning. That means that children aren't getting the emotional and social skills that they need both to defend themselves and to ensure that they deal with their emotional needs in a way that doesn't hurt others.

Because of those restraints, there's less opportunity for students to engage in their local community and create linkages with supports outside of the school. The heavy number of competency requirements leaves little opportunity to add innovative and interactive learning opportunities around bullying—and other social issues, frankly—or to have guest speakers and teachers from the community. Falconer suggested mandatory classroom management training and crisis intervention training for teachers. We haven't seen that, Speaker, and so the problems that Mr. Falconer was brought in to study dealing with violence in schools continue to be unaddressed.

Again, in the 2008 Falconer report, *Roots of Youth Violence*, he indicated that key to reducing and preventing violence in the schools was connection with community organizations, creating community hubs, funding community outreach workers. He recommended that government "enhance or create local centres, often based in or around schools, in which opportunities and services for youth and their families can be maximized, and community cohesion fostered...."

"(1) Creating community hubs, wherever possible anchored in school facilities, not only to provide programs and services, but just as importantly to provide space and to facilitate connections."

The McGuinty government has put some funds in to support the use of schools for community organizations, but this, Speaker, is a far cry from developing community hubs: partnered and integrated use of schools to support the health of children and families. Only one in five elementary schools and one in three high schools has staff time allocated for school-community connections. We need to move towards a model of full-service schools, where students and families benefit from community resources and also contribute to the betterment of their community. Unfortunately, unlike other provinces, Ontario has still not developed a policy framework for community hubs.

The development of child and family centres in Ontario, a key part of the Pascal report, appears to be stalled. Local schools are slated to close in part because of an outdated funding formula which fails to provide the funds that schools need. So we're losing local schools that could be used as community hubs to promote safe and inclusive communities. I'll just note one, Speaker, because my guess is that other members of this chamber have received letters about it, and that's PCVS in Peterborough. A letter from a parent:

"As a parent the most frustrating part"—talking about the proposed closure of the school—"is not being able to explain the logistics of our KPR board's decision." Peterborough community vocational school, PCVS, "has the highest enrolment, lowest operating cost and lowest projected capital costs of the four high schools that were reviewed. The notion of a super school with increased bussing and therefore lower extracurricular activities is not what taxpayers want. PCVS is also the one 'safe school' in our district, having a gay-straight alliance and a higher-than-average number of gay students who've transferred into our school for acceptance.

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"The Peterborough Lakefield police department has publicly acknowledged that PCVS has the least involvement of all our high schools." Closing successful schools that are crucial to the functioning of communities does not help us deal with safety in our schools, does not help us support our children in building for the future that they deserve and need. This bill, without those supports and resources in the broader community, is going to be only a very, very small step towards what we need.

Speaker, there are concerns about enforcement. What will the Minister of Education do when schools or boards fail to follow the requirements of this act? And I look forward to hearing from the minister addressing that question.

Julian Falconer proposed the creation of a provincial school safety and equity officer to be a central repository for the reporting of serious issues of student safety. He also proposed whistle-blower protection for staff who anonymously report threats to school safety. He also echoed calls for a student hotline separate from the main school number or website. I note that the government has partnered with the Kids Help line, but it is not clear that that is sufficient, and frankly, again, talking to high

school students in my riding, they have real questions about Kids Help line as well.

I've outlined a number of problems here, Speaker, that are not addressed or inadequately addressed in this bill. As contentious as they may be, there is another issue that has taken on much more profile, and that takes me to the whole question of student clubs to reduce bullying, the most contentious section of this bill—and that is because one section has to do with the formation of gay-straight alliances in schools. This is the part of the bill that helps to address two issues: cultural change and building support networks for those who are under attack.

Culture change—because when authorities recognize and respect groups that are under attack, that are subjected to abusive action, it changes the dynamic of power. When authorities show respect for girls, when authorities show respect for those who have different skin colour, show respect for those who are disabled, show respect for our gay youth, that helps to shift the culture as much as the principal of my school coming in to talk to my class when I was in grade 3. It says the ground has to move. Allowing students in schools, under the sanction of the administration, to set up clubs says to all students that those students deserve respect; that the authorities in charge of the schools and the education system believe that those students deserve respect. Allowing students in schools to set up support networks gives them the security of being together and reduces the isolation that we all know can be, literally, deadly.

I want to look at this section in a bit more detail. Section 303.1:

“Every board shall support pupils who want to establish and lead,

“(a) activities or organizations that promote gender equity;

“(b) activities or organizations that promote anti-racism;

“(c) activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people with disabilities; or

“(d) activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name.”

First of all, this section recognizes that bullies can use a variety of excuses for abusing people. Secondly, the section gives support to students who want to make schools better. Let's look at each category.

Activities or organizations that promote gender equity: Girls in high school are commonly subjected to sexual harassment. That is a reality of life in this province today. The safe schools action team report notes that almost half the girls surveyed in high school had to deal with some kind of sexual harassment. Some of them have to deal with very severe harassment. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health did a study and produced a report that the safe schools action team used as their source material. They noted that some girls were severely affected

psychologically. No one in this chamber can say that it doesn't happen. No one can say that girls who want to organize in schools shouldn't do that. They should be given support to come together, to make this kind of harassment socially unacceptable, and I'm sure all of us in here today would say that we should support this.

Racism: The bill says clubs can be organized around “activities or organizations that promote anti-racism.” Well, Speaker, racism is a real problem here in Ontario. I'm not going to single out any particular region, but, interestingly, when I went through googling on the weekend, Lakehead Social Planning Council in Thunder Bay has a very useful, detailed fact sheet on fighting anti-aboriginal racism in local schools. They talk about the need to respect cultural differences and the need to take on racism.

No one in this building can deny the damage that racism has done. Look at what First Nations of this country endured at the hands of the residential school system. I was going through yesterday—I looked at an article in the Catholic Register on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, dealing with the aftermath of the residential schools. I have to say, a friend of mine, active in the United Church, spent a good number of years dealing with the consequences of those years and the need for that church to find the resources to try to do what it could to make amends.

I'll note what is said in the Catholic Register: “Though not an official recommendation of the interim report” of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “the commissioners do urge churches to be specific and forthcoming about what contributions they can make to rebuilding and restoring aboriginal culture, language and spirituality.

“What role did the churches play in undoing (aboriginal culture)? And where does that lead in terms of considering what role the churches might play?” asked commissioner Marie Wilson.

“Teachers in church-run schools often ridiculed, belittled or denigrated traditional spirituality and belief systems, said Wilson.

“There were very, very negative messages children were given about their own parents, about their parents' beliefs and belief systems,” she said.

“As aboriginal people seek to reassert their own identity, many people perceive a conflict between reclaiming traditional spirituality and membership in Christian churches, said Sinclair.

“Many aboriginal people's connection to the churches remains strong,” he said. “If an individual is going to remain connected to his church, the question arises about how you reconcile your return to tradition, language and culture—and in particular your traditional belief systems—while at the same time practising your Christian faith.”

Well, Speaker, no one ever said that culture was easy. No one ever said that addressing problems in our culture and society was easy. But clearly, churches and the aboriginal community, through the Truth and Reconcilia-

tion Commission, are working on trying to find that solution, to reconcile the two different streams; to take what is in the past, learn from it, correct the damage that has been done, and move on, hopefully, with a solidarity that will enrich all. We have learned from our history—maybe imperfectly, maybe incompletely, but we have learned. No one can say that those who are suffering from racism, from bias shouldn't be able to organize and combat that bias.

1700

Subsection (c) related to student clubs: “activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people with disabilities.” You know, Speaker, we may talk less about this than we talk about racism or sexual harassment, but it's a very real problem. Again, looking through for documentation, Bloorview Kids Rehab has a number of articles on the bullying of the disabled. They report a 2007 review of international literature by Canadian authors finds kids with physical and developmental disabilities are at greater risk of being bullied. In a 2003 Canadian Council on Social Development study, 11% of children with special needs aged 10 to 11 reported that they were bullied “all or most of the time,” versus 5% of peers without disabilities. A 1998 British study of 55 children with hemiplegia—paralysis of one side of the body—and 55 classmates without found that 45% of those with hemiplegia were moderately or severely victimized, compared to 13% of peers without disabilities. Can you imagine, Speaker, half your body paralyzed, and on the basis of being struck like that, subjected to abuse by the children that you interact with every day?

On the Bloorview website, they posted a story about a child dealing with bullying and disabilities. “When her daughter Sequoiah graduated from Bloorview's primary school to a regular grade 2 class in Burlington, Kerene Wallace was shocked to learn that Sequoiah was being bullied.

“I expected that this might happen in the older grades, but these children were in grades 1 and 2,” Kerene says.

“Sequoiah was singled out because of her unusual walking gait, chronically teased on the playground, and made to hand over her snack every day. ‘She was totally overwhelmed,’ Kerene says.

“Children with physical and developmental disabilities are at greater risk of being bullied by peers, say the authors of a 2007 Canadian article that reviews the international literature on the topic.”

I found this extraordinary. I guess it shouldn't be surprising, but it is horrifying. It is horrifying, Speaker. “In a follow-up study published in *Child: Care, Health and Development*, Holland Bloorview researchers asked the same group of youth with cerebral palsy how their participation in school life could be improved.”

What about these disabled kids, these disabled children who are being bullied? “The students identified three key strategies: learn how to explain your disability to peers and teachers, rather than trying to hide it; improve disability and bullying awareness so students are

more comfortable seeking help; and develop friendships by engaging in extracurricular activities. Research shows that having a support network of friends protects children from being isolated and bullied.”

Speaker, there's nothing in that paragraph that doesn't apply to every other group of children subjected to bullying. Who amongst us would say that children with cerebral palsy or other disabilities shouldn't be given support and respect to live their lives? Who would reject the advice that has been given?

That takes me to the last category in this subsection of the bill: “(d) activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name.”

Everything that has been seen to be true for other responses to oppression based on gender, racism or ability is true when we come to sexual orientation. Yet, as you are well aware, Speaker, this is the most contentious item of the bill. We'll explore that, I am sure, as we go further through debate and through committee.

This bill supports formation of equity-promoting groups for gay and lesbian students but does not require school boards to allow students to determine the most appropriate name for the committee. Speaker, I think that is a change that is going to be necessary, to give the students the right to determine the names of their committees. This lack runs counter to the aim of creating schools which are accepting of all students and of stopping prejudice and discrimination.

Egale Canada says “GSAs ... demonstrably improve the lives of” lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning “youth, increasing safety and improving their self-esteem.”

By simply existing, GSAs present students “with the idea that LGBTQ identities have a place in the school, and society at large. Directly engaging LGBTQ youth and their allies within school, as well as those who are ambivalent regarding” those “themes, is an excellent means towards addressing school climate, isolation and promoting social connectedness...”

A recent study in California found GSA presence and participation in high school to be highly correlated with decreased depression, substance abuse and lifetime suicide attempts among LGBT young adults.

Now we started off this afternoon with the member from Nepean–Carleton talking about the tragic death of Jamie Huble. I have to say his death was not one that was so rare that we could say there was no pattern. I wish—and this is tragic to say—I wish it was that rare.

In the Toronto Star last December, Antonia Zerbisias wrote about Support Our Youth, an organization in Toronto on Sherbourne Street that supports gay youth. In her article, she talked about how children are bullied and how gay children tend to be particularly picked out for abusive treatment.

She notes in her article: “Numerous studies suggest that among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, approximate-

ly 32 per cent contemplate or attempt suicide (compared to 7 per cent of all youth)' says a recent analysis by Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health." Those are very high numbers, Speaker. Those are numbers that every person in this room should keep in mind as we debate this bill, because the simple reality is that we're dealing with decisions that will affect life and death of our young people. Researchers and advocates say that "it's not their sexuality that leads these kids down a suicidal path—it's the stigma and discrimination they face in a heterosexual world.... Jamie Hubley, 15, killed himself" last fall. "Orangeville girlfriends Jeanine Blanchette, 21, and Chantal Dube, 17, were found in a wooded area in 2010, apparently after committing suicide with pills.

"In 2007, 13-year-old Shaquille Wisdom hung himself the day after he was stuffed into a garbage can at his Ajax high school. His homophobic bullies have never been outed—or punished."

All of us have a responsibility to protect our children no matter what colour they are, what gender they are, no matter what their gender orientation. All of us in this building, in this chamber, who have power, authority and responsibility have to protect our children. Speaker, we cannot abandon children to their fate; we have to act.

Bill 13 could be enhanced by incorporating elements of the Conservatives' anti-bullying private member's bill. Elements around public reporting, enhanced staff training, inclusion in curriculum, alternative programming—all those need to be taken into account as we get into committee, and everything that is going to advance the protection of children in this province that is incorporated in that private member's bill needs to be brought into the government's bill.

1710

Speaker, I want to summarize. Reducing and eliminating violence in schools requires addressing factors that contribute to violent behaviour: isolation, homelessness, poverty, inadequate housing, lack of community supports. All those factors have to be taken on.

This bill will not be successful unless it's integrated into a comprehensive strategy to reduce and eliminate violence. That means taking action to reduce poverty, not putting in place policies that exacerbate inequality and shift taxes from big corporations on to modest-income families.

That means ensuring that a full range of supports is available for gay and lesbian youth, including gay-straight alliances, something that the government and this bill have to ensure.

That means moving ahead with the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum to build student capacity to defer and prevent bullying. That means ensuring that there is adequate funding for alternative programming for at-risk children and youth, something the government, by delaying the review of the funding formula, has failed to ensure.

That means ensuring that if additional responsibilities are given to principals and teachers, then we need to pro-

vide the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities. That means reducing inequities in resources between schools, by reining in the growing reliance on fees and fundraising.

It means ensuring that the curriculum is based on development, knowledge and skills by broadening the set of measures by which we evaluate schools beyond the EQAO scores. That means ensuring that there's follow-up and consequences if boards fail to implement required measures. That means ensuring that monitoring and reporting requirements provide data on bullying that is valid, comprehensive and available to schools and the public.

It means ensuring that there's adequate school funding for proper supervision, staff training, student supports, so supports are in place to avoid, whenever possible, reliance on suspension and expulsion.

We need to move forward steadily. We need to move forward quickly to deal with bias, prejudice and violence in our schools. It is in our hands. We are charged with this task. We cannot drop it. We cannot let it go. We have to take it forward.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for Toronto–Danforth for his remarks, and thank him for his thoughtful advice and criticism with respect to the areas that this piece of legislation could be improved.

In the time I have, I want to speak to a couple of things. One, I want to recognize that Bill 13 is one piece of a comprehensive strategy that our government has advanced to see that all of our schools are safe and accepting places for all of our students. We understand the importance of the investments that we have previously made in children's mental health, which are coming into our schools right across the province right now. We know the important steps that need to be taken to build upon the work that we have done and the investments we have made with respect to safe schools.

We also know that there are other pieces to this puzzle, and that's why we have asked the curriculum council to review our curriculum across our schools, to understand how we can embed a culture of acceptance, tolerance, care and compassion and empathy into all of our schools at all of our grades, every single day of the year, for all of our students.

That's also why we have indicated that we'll be bringing forward an expert panel that can give us advice to determine what types of programs should be put in our schools to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect our students.

My colleague talked about that we should never lose sight of advancing the protection of children, and I rise once again to say that, absolutely, we are deeply committed to Bill 13 and the comprehensive strategy it brings forward. But the purpose of a debate in the Legislature, the purpose of the public hearings we will have, the purpose of committee is to find every best idea that can

be brought forward to make this piece of legislation even stronger. We're committed to doing that, and I thank him for advice in that regard.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen to the thoughtful comments of the member from Toronto–Danforth, and I commend him for his genuine nature, the very balanced commentary and the fact that he introduced his remarks by commenting on the member from our side, our critic Lisa MacLeod from Nepean–Carleton. Going back to her comments and some of the issues that were raised, I believe that she was passionate and compassionate in her remarks, and I think the same tone would apply to the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Toward the end of his remarks, he did recognize the tragedy, that Jamie Hubble's death sort of frames how important being opposed to all forms of bullying is, and I think that's what Lisa was trying relentlessly to say. She was disappointed that the government wasn't prepared to work more co-operatively with the opposition.

Bill 14 by Elizabeth Witmer from Kitchener–Waterloo—she's tried to work with them, as well as our critic, and I'm sure the NDP as well, to find this balance that we're looking for. In itself, Mr. Speaker, that's a statement about respect. Respect for each other is important, and this sets the template here of this as either good policy or politics. We'll see.

The minister—I've watched several of her programs on television—seems rather intransigent in terms of certain kinds of deliverables. I don't know whether it's her particularly or Premier McGuinty. I believe it's the Premier and cabinet telling her what to do. But it's clear; I heard the member from Toronto–Danforth. The elimination of bullying—he said this bill is not successful unless it eliminates violence, and she tried to branch over to the fact that there are other factors. But the point here is that we are opposed to bullying and this bill simply doesn't get it done.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to comment on my colleague from Toronto–Danforth, the Minister of Education and the member from Durham. Originally, when this came to the House for first reading and there was debate about whether we should work together on 13 and 14, I was relieved that on an issue that shouldn't be partisan, we were actually going to work together in a non-partisan fashion. This is one issue that shouldn't be partisan, because along with power, which we all have in this Parliament, comes responsibility. And on this issue, it seems we are quickly failing.

I believe that the member from Nepean was really, really compassionate. But honestly, if my kids were sitting where those pages are, they would have felt bullied. I wasn't in the House when that happened; I was watching it on the TV in my office. But I think that as a House, to talk about a bill about bullying and having children in the House with the bells—I just don't think

that was respectful of the House or of the kids who are working here—

Mr. Jim McDonnell: All we're asking for is an all-committee debate. They don't want to do that. This House voted for this. You guys voted with us.

Mr. John Vanthof: But we could have done it in some other way. I'm just saying that if those were my kids, I would have been offended. They aren't my kids, and I was still a bit offended. So I hope we can all really work together in the future and for—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not saying whose fault it was. I'm just saying we can all work together. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

1720

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Toronto–Danforth with respect to Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, as well as the minister's response and those of the members from Durham and Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I know that everyone in this House agrees that bullying in schools is a very serious issue and one that we must act on. We've all read the stories. As a mother, I'm saddened by the stories I read about and that I hear about in this House. I speak with my children about bullying and the many forms that it may take: written, oral and electronic.

Bill 13 is a world-class bill. The Accepting Schools Act is a key component of our plan to make all schools healthy, safe and inclusive, where all students feel accepted. Ontario is recognized across jurisdictions as leading the way with aggressive safe-school legislation, but we know there's more to do.

The legislation provides clear expectations and increased accountability. I see it as a complete bill. I cannot agree with the statement that was made earlier that this government has been selfish. This government is the first that has taken bullying as an issue that is very serious. Since 2004, we have invested \$285 million in safe school initiatives. No other government has invested in safe schools.

I do agree that it is unfortunate that the opposition could not come to an agreement. Let's be clear: All of us want to end bullying and want to protect our children. It's unfortunate that recommended amendments could not be agreed to. It's unfortunate that, again, this is a case where the opposition suggests that unless it's a definition written by them, it can't be good. "Who's playing politics here?" is the question that I have this afternoon.

We all agree that our children are valued, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation and/or any element—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Your time's up, but thank you very much.

I return to the member for Toronto–Danforth, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the Minister of Education, member for Durham, member for Timiskaming–

Cochrane and member from Windsor West for their comments.

One comment, Minister of Education: the suggestion of an expert panel—we've already had the safe schools action team; we've had the Falconer report; we had Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling. We've had a lot of expert panels, so if you're going to suggest an expert panel, I think you're going to have to tell all of us here what added value they would bring. I'm not sure that's a productive line, but I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

To the member from Durham: When we talk about all forms of bullying, you're right. Everyone in this House would say that every instance of bullying and abusive behaviour is something that we reject. In our guts we reject it, not just intellectually. But I have to say that there are instances in which abusive behaviour is far more profound, and there are those who are subjected to it far more commonly and intensely as a group than others. It was very clear from the reading that I did that if you are disabled, let me tell you, you are more vulnerable and more likely to be bullied. We have to pay attention to those children. If you are part of the aboriginal community, you have gone through some very intense, abusive and difficult times that were not visited on non-aboriginals, the residential schools being an example. So yes, we want to deal with all bullying, but recognize that there are different circumstances for different groups.

Last, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane: You expressed well this whole question of us wanting to find the way forward. I'm not particularly picky about whether a bill is Liberal or Conservative or NDP on this issue. We're looking for the elements in the bills that will advance the situation of our children the most. That's what we care about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I'm pleased to speak today on behalf of the Minister of Education, my colleague, on an issue that is deeply personal to anyone who has ever been pushed on a stairway or had their lunch kicked across the floor, been trash-talked, harassed online or had to get into a physical fight that they never wanted to have.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry to interrupt. I would ask the opposition members to allow the member for Mississauga–Streetsville to make his remarks. He's just getting started. I need to hear him.

I recognize again the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. I guess sometimes the bullying instinct is instinctive.

Even the former bullies themselves usually go on with their lives and pause to reflect back at a future time and ask themselves if something could have been done at that stage in life to have kept them from creating memories at which they themselves now wince and cringe when they

remember pushing someone more vulnerable than themselves around at school.

Just as we can take pride in our progress as a society and how we reach out to newcomers to our country in helping them learn English, convert their experience and training to their Canadian or Ontario equivalent, restart their careers, settle their families and get on with life, we need to look into the mirror and make that type of progress in our schools that we've made in our communities and in our workplaces.

Discrimination is wrong, and we get that. So is bullying, and we'll work with parents, students, teachers and school administrators to prevent bullying and to create safe and accepting schools.

Children in Ontario suffer every day because of bullying. It is not a normal part of growing up. What is normal about watching as your brother gets beaten to a pulp and comes home in tears with his glasses smashed at the hands of a bunch of thugs who beat up on him just because they thought they could and nobody would do anything about it? Ontario says that no child, male or female, regardless of colour, religion, physical attribute or sexual orientation will suffer or feel fear or terror because of bullying.

Together, as adults, as parents, as students, as members of our communities and as a government, Ontarians want every student in our schools to be treated with equal respect and acceptance. Our schools will be places to see acceptance, inclusion and student safety in action, and to develop the habits of good citizenship and humanity that sustain us through adulthood.

Ontarians know that pushing people around, asserting power by dominating those more vulnerable, is not a simple problem, and our ministry does not prescribe a simple solution to bullying, but our students, their friends, brothers and sisters want action and they don't need excuses. That's why Ontario has introduced Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act.

This act will, if passed, help change attitudes and behaviours toward bullying, and it will help change the culture in society among youth and in our schools toward bullying. This legislation aims to make it better now, and progress starts with our schools, to ensure they remain the safest and the best in the world. Kids can't be expected to succeed in school if they don't feel safe, welcome and respected.

The Accepting Schools Act, if passed, will introduce tougher consequences for bullying and hate-motivated actions. As well, if passed, it will provide clear expectations and increased accountability for school boards and for bullies themselves. This includes a progressive discipline, which makes expulsion from school a possible consequence for bullying.

The Accepting Schools Act would require all schools to support students who want to lead activities that promote gender equity, anti-racism, understanding and respect for people with disabilities and people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including groups with the name gay-straight alliance or another

name. We know that these kinds of activities help students find support and send a clear message that Ontario is serious about inclusion and respect.

Students need to know that they're not alone, and bullies need to know that their peers, their school, their family and their community will not tolerate them if they discriminate against anyone based on their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or any other reason.

Discrimination goes beyond physical intimidation. Words can do the same damage to the mind and to one's lifetime self-esteem as fists do to their face. This makes bullying an issue for both genders. Kids that have been bullied need to know that support is there for them. Unfortunately, bullying sometimes goes unreported because students feel uncomfortable about speaking to an adult. That's why this legislation also provides for the creation of student-led support groups. Student-led groups provide a place for students to speak freely to their peers—peers who can often better understand what they're going through, perhaps because they have been there themselves or have even harmed others and come to regret it.

1730

If passed, the legislation would legally require school boards to have policies on bullying prevention and early intervention, progressive discipline, and equity and inclusive education. It would add a definition of "bullying" to the Education Act so that everyone understands what we mean, what we say, and that bullying has no place in Ontario schools.

This legislation would also designate the third week of every November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week to encourage and support existing activities in boards and within communities to make clear that bullying must end.

Our minister visited some schools during Bullying Awareness Week and saw first-hand some of the great work our schools are doing right now to raise awareness and to change students' behaviour. We want to continue supporting that.

In fact, Speaker, Ontario is actively recognizing and encouraging schools to create a safe, inclusive and healthy environment. Through the healthy schools recognition program, schools are recognized for their work in promoting a wide variety of healthy activities and behaviours, and this includes bullying prevention.

In 2011, the new Premier's Safe Schools Awards celebrated outstanding work done by some of the safe schools teams across Ontario. This legislation would continue to build on the existing work, like Ontario's safe schools strategy and the province's equity and inclusive education strategy.

If passed, the Accepting Schools Act would also require boards to report on progress against goals with specific measurement metrics for establishing a positive learning climate for all students, which would create greater transparency and accountability.

The act would require organizations using school property to follow standards consistent with the provin-

cial code of conduct. The provincial code of conduct will set clear standards for behaviour for individual school boards to follow. It includes fundamental beliefs, like everyone has a responsibility to promote a safe environment; all members of the school community are to be treated with respect and dignity; everyone has a responsibility to resolve conflicts in a way that is civil and respectful; and everyone is expected to resolve conflicts without using violence either in word or in deed.

These changes to the legislation would be part of our commitment to make sure Ontario is taking a whole-community approach to making its schools more inclusive.

It's not enough to propose a new law in order to fix bullying. That's why this legislation is one part of a comprehensive action plan to address bullying in Ontario schools. The other steps recognize that we all have a role to play in making our schools safer. Schools and school boards alone are not singly responsible for addressing these complex societal issues. The other steps will build on Ontario's comprehensive efforts since 2003 to prevent bullying and to create a positive school environment.

We will focus on integrating mental health supports in schools as part of Ontario's 10-year mental health and addictions strategy and continued support for Kids Help Phone. The growing need to support kids with mental health challenges is clear. Mental health issues aren't identified early enough, and when they are, wait-lists for services are still too long. Too many children and youth still suffer in silence, and not enough families reach out for resources, help and comfort. To talk seriously about leaving no one behind and supporting student achievement, we need to better address mental health and addictions.

Some of those supports are already finding their way into our school boards. As part of the plan, Ontario will also create an Accepting Schools expert panel to provide advice about resources that focus on a whole-school approach, including prevention and early intervention.

The ministry has directed Ontario's curriculum council to report back later this year on strengthening equity and inclusive education principles, bullying prevention strategies across the curriculum, and suggesting ways to improve this learning in Ontario schools.

As part of the action plan, Ontario will also look at launching a public awareness campaign to stress that all Ontarians have a role in preventing and ending bullying.

We are not alone in thinking this way. We have the support of our partners. They recognize that we have more to do and that we need to stand up and work together, to stand together and to say together that bullying is not acceptable in our schools.

Bullying destroys students' well-being. Only by working together can we ensure a positive school climate where everyone—and this province means everyone—feels welcome and safe.

As adults, we know what children need to succeed. Research shows that students are more likely to succeed academically if they feel welcome, accepted and con-

nected at school. It doesn't come as a surprise. Whether it's physical or emotional, no one wants to go anywhere that brings feelings of pain and humiliation.

Some things that may seem small and trivial, like comments or language that we use, is where the most work needs to be done. Everyone knows that shoving or hitting another student is hurtful. We must ensure that everyone understands that language can also make someone feel hurt, alone or uncomfortable.

Adults know that they cannot concentrate and do our best work when we feel overwhelmed, stressed, afraid or worried. Why should students feel any different?

Students who feel rejection, exclusion and estrangement often suffer from behavioural problems in the classroom, lower interest in school, lower student achievement and higher dropout rates. For every student to succeed, we need to go beyond better academic results, lower class sizes and higher test scores. These statistical metrics are important and they've shown dramatic progress in Ontario. The graduation rate has increased for the seventh year in a row. It's now up to 82%, up from 68% in 2003. That number means an additional 93,000 students have graduated than would have if the rate had stayed at the 2003 level. Ontario was recently recognized in another OECD report for being a world leader in education.

We want to build on the gains that we've made and continue to support all of our students to succeed. That means we need to continue to focus on the conditions of success. That includes a safe, inclusive and healthy learning environment.

Bill 13 was created to help protect Ontario students, and we've received great support from many people. But most importantly, we've received support from those for whom this bill was created in the first place: students.

During the past several months, the Minister of Education has had the opportunity to meet with students to discuss their thoughts and feelings about bullying, about this bill and about school in general. It's been these personal stories of individual struggles and achievements that have been the most compelling. Students have told us that they need to attend schools where they feel safe, secure and comfortable, and students need to feel that they have the support that they need to succeed. That's important, because students should never feel that the only way to escape a bullying situation is to move to another school, to stop going to school, or even worse, to consider taking their own lives.

Feeling like you're being forced out of a school, a place that should feel like a welcoming community, isn't fair to anyone and it doesn't benefit anyone. Students need to know that when they cross the school threshold they're safe, they're welcome and they're accepted as the unique individuals that they are.

Just last week, several bright, passionate young people were here at Queen's Park to speak about bullying. They talked about how much they love their schools and they shared examples of the times their teachers and principals stepped in to address bullying. They also had some

wrenching stories to tell about having been bullied. They talked about how important it was that their schools were a place where they felt like they belonged.

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That's why we as legislators must make every one of Ontario's schools a positive and accepting place for students to learn, to play and to grow. This bill is about every student, no matter who they are, where they came from, what they like or whom they hang around with. It's about what students need to feel safe and to feel welcome. It's about our responsibility to protect and educate our students in our schools.

We cannot do that without talking to students. They can tell us what's happening in our schools. By working together with students, we can make sure that we're on the right track. We have some of the best students in the world. We can benefit from that. They have a lot to offer.

We also need to let students know it's important to speak up against bullying. Our Minister of Education continues to deliver precisely that message to students.

Ontario's partners in education support this endeavour. Our schools are working hard to address bullying. The minister has visited schools doing outstanding work to prevent bullying and to ensure that students feel supported. The ministry is hearing stories from so many more. I want to thank the principals, teachers, school staff, especially the students, their parents and community partners for taking a stand on bullying.

When a child enters school, it's a stepping stone to their education, to their future and to our future. They need to know that it's their opportunity to learn and to grow.

We all have a role to play in standing up against bullying. Through this legislation, those of us sent here to share in governing Ontarians have stepped up to that responsibility.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to speak on some of the comments Mr. Delaney from Mississauga–Streetsville raised.

One in particular is the "working together" portion of his comments. You know, that's something that I've been hearing throughout my riding, that they'd like the government to work, obviously, with the opposition and adopt the recommendations that my colleague Elizabeth Witmer, from Kitchener–Waterloo, has put forward in Bill 14.

In fact, our local media, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record recently engaged in the debate itself and said that the government, in fact, would be wise to look at Ms. Witmer's bill with the thought of incorporating some of her suggestions.

I also want to raise some of the concerns—in fact, the overwhelming opposition concerns—from folks in my riding. I'll read you just a few here.

Hazel from Kitchener emailed me just recently to say that there are much better ways to help children. She's

concerned that if Bill 13 becomes law, it will only increase problems.

Manfred from Kitchener contacted my office to share his view that Bill 13 should not be passed as it stands today.

Constance, a retired teacher, in fact, from Kitchener, who's a strong advocate against bullying, feels that Bill 13 will do little to help children and youth suffering the devastating effects of bullying.

Monica, a mother of two young children from Wellesley, feels that Bill 13 will do nothing to help prevent bullying.

Sarah from New Hamburg wrote to me asking that, as her MPP, I vote against Bill 13 in favour of the PC anti-bullying bill, Bill 14. She's concerned that schools do not have the facilities to implement this bill.

Joyce from Petersburg is concerned also with Bill 13, and says that it was devised in a vacuum without consulting parents.

I just again want to reiterate some of those comments that Mr. Delaney talked about in "working together." I encourage the government to work together with this side of the House and incorporate, again, suggestions put forward in Bill 14 by our colleague Elizabeth Witmer.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks for the opportunity to get up and speak to this issue, and thank you for the comments from the member from Mississauga—

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Oh, sorry. I've got to move my chair.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, you have to be at your seat. I'm sorry I didn't recognize that at the outset.

I again recognize the member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks to the member for his comments.

Just a couple of points I wanted to make. There's a lot of "mays" versus "shalls" in this legislation. If you look at section 301 of the act as being amended by adding the following subsections, the minister "may" establish policies and guidelines with respect to bullying, and "may" provide training, "may" provide resources. I think many of these "mays" need to be changed to "shalls," and training of teachers needs to be expanded beyond teachers. It needs to be extended to maintenance staff and support staff. They are the eyes and ears of the students when they are in the playground, when they're in the cafeteria, when they're in the hallway, even when they're in the washrooms of the schools. These are the people who can be bringing bullying issues to light in a very timely way.

I also wanted to talk about whether or not there needs to be something in the legislation similar to the Occupational Health and Safety Act that actually deals with violations of the act with respect to the safety and the health of workers. In those situations, in fact,

hospitals and public offices who violate the act and do not provide for the health and safety of workers actually are fined. So there's monitoring that takes place. There are requirements for education, and there are fines that take place when employees and workers are injured in this province, so perhaps that would be an impetus for boards to actually implement policies and procedures and would assist in promoting the health and safety of our students in our schools.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Monsieur le Président, ça me fait plaisir de me lever aujourd'hui pour parler en faveur de ce projet de loi.

This bullying problem in schools is very close to my heart. Two of my nieces were bullied—imagine, one in kindergarten and the other one in high school. They were both bullied differently, but it changed their lives. It's changed their lives altogether.

In the first case, the school reacted very positively. They called everyone together, the parents of this boy who was the bully and my sister and her husband. They dealt with it, and it was resolved in no time.

In the second case, the school did not react properly, so my other niece was on suicide watch for quite some time because of what she was going through. They had to move her to another high school, and when it is the only high school in the area, they have to move her two hours away. You know, she had to find an apartment for one year in high school. It's a bit young to have your own apartment.

I hope that in this House we will all work together to make sure that this does not happen to one more kid. We should put aside our differences as parties. We should all work to make sure that we have a strong piece of legislation and everybody knows their own responsibility.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to get up to talk to the bill today. I hear from the member from Mississauga—Streetsville about the need to co-operate, and I can't agree more. I guess I find it disappointing that the three parties were working together on a bill that would truly look at the issues here, only to find out at the last moment that another bill was being introduced. I think it just shows that when we're working as a group, things have changed. I think, as I heard earlier, there are likely many people in this House who were bullied at one time. But bullying has changed; there are different things we have to worry about. It speaks to the need of working together to come up with a—a serious issue here that needs some serious attention.

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I guess the actions we see around here really speak of the functioning of this House, and what we've seen since my relatively short time here—I think if we're truly concerned about trying to meet the needs—I mean, we've

had some support from the elementary school teachers, that are on our side. We've seen this bill that's being proposed really drive some wedges between some of the groups that are coming in, that are concerned about bullying—but have pulled out the worst aspects about what we see from our society.

I think if they really, truly want to work together, come and support Bill 14 and work together. Send it to the committee, as we've asked, and as was agreed to up front. I'm really wondering myself, what changed course here? Why all of a sudden the change? If we're talking about another issue coming up later this week where they're looking for support, well, if they're really truly looking for support—let us be able to trust the other side. Let's work together for a common good. We're wanting to see some results, and we look forward to Bill 14 going through.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay, that concludes the time for questions and comments. I return now to the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I thank the members for their comments.

To the member for Kitchener–Conestoga: Speaker, the member will have an opportunity to debate Bill 14 at another time; this debate is about Bill 13. But if the member still wants to talk about contributing to Bill 13, will he both table the entire letters that he was reading and specifically address homophobia and advocate the freedom of students to discuss issues of their sexuality in a safe environment at their school?

I thank the member from Welland. I hear your comments, and perhaps they can be discussed in terms of your suggestions to some of the supporting regulations around Bill 13.

To the member for Ottawa–Vanier: The member for Ottawa–Vanier understands that you don't fight fire with fire; you fight fire with water. This bill's measures represent the ability of schools to quench the fires of bullying with the water of countermeasures and understanding.

To the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry: Will the member please advocate within his caucus to set ideology aside, which is something that I'm sure he can do, and to remember that we were all sent here to work together for the best good of our province and our schools and our students, and we have before us the measures to do it. If that member and his caucus put their heads together and park the ideology at the door, I am personally very confident that we can achieve exactly what we have both set out to achieve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am honoured to rise today to speak to the issue of bullying and specifically to Bill 13. We don't have much time left for debate today. Unfortunately, I won't be able to speak fully to this issue, but that is the way of the clock, and I will come back another time to finish my debate.

It is certainly a measure of how important the issue of bullying is in the province of Ontario today, and preven-

tion of bullying, that we actually have two bills before the Legislature at the same time. In fact, these bills—Bill 13, which is the government bill, and Bill 14, which is a private member's bill brought forward by my friend and colleague the member from Kitchener–Waterloo—were brought forward on the same day, November 30, 2011.

I can say that Bill 14 is the result of a very comprehensive investigation that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo entered into. As you know, she is also a former Minister of Education as well as a teacher and a school board trustee, so she certainly knows whereof she speaks. She entered into extensive consultations with school personnel, with parents, with teachers and, most importantly, with students. The result, in my view, is a very thoughtful and comprehensive bill that certainly is well worth our time to discuss here in this Legislature.

I firmly believe that Bill 14—as opposed to the government bill—would, if passed, have a significant impact in reducing bullying across the province. I will return to a comparison of the relative merits of Bill 13 and Bill 14, Mr. Speaker, but before I do, I would just like to speak for a few moments on the need for a concentrated effort to reduce bullying in the province of Ontario.

Bullying, as we have heard today, has reached an unprecedented level and has certainly far surpassed the old “sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me” kind of mentality. That mostly happened when I was young.

Bullying now has reached unprecedented levels and has become very sophisticated, and it has become something that can be done across the Web. Cyberbullying is becoming very popular with some people. As a result, we see many young people who are being tormented to the point of suicide because they can't bear to deal with their tormentors any longer.

Unfortunately, we have had two very tragic situations that have happened in the province of Ontario within the last year, where two young people did tragically take their own lives.

Last October, a young man named Jamie Hubley committed suicide after enduring years of torment simply because he was gay. In December, Jamie's parents, Allan and Wendy Hubley, came to Queen's Park to discuss their commitment to action on the anti-bullying issue despite their grief.

I did have the opportunity to meet with Mr. and Mrs. Hubley, along with Lisa MacLeod and Elizabeth Witmer. We assured them at that time that we would do everything we could do to ensure that legislation would be passed that would protect all of our children from bullying.

In September 2011, Mitchell Wilson, an 11-year-old boy from Pickering, also took his own life on the eve of being required to testify in court against another older boy who mugged him and stole his iPhone.

Mitchell suffered from muscular dystrophy, as a result of which he had a slow and laboured gait. The alleged mugger was arrested the day after the attack, charged

with assault and was removed from the school. Yet his friends remained and they continued to taunt Mitchell—taunting him and baiting him on the way home from school.

The spectre of the act haunted Mitchell and he began to suffer severe panic and anxiety attacks. A downward spiral started, which culminated in Mitchell's suicide. Sadly, this is not unusual. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among 10- to 24-year olds.

Mitchell's father, like Mr. and Mrs. Huble, is hoping that by speaking to the media, visiting schools and telling Mitchell's story he can prevent other children from being bullied and educate people about what it's like to have a disability. I think that's one area that we really haven't touched on enough in all the debate, although I recognize that many members, particularly the member from Danforth, commented on the issues involving children with disabilities and what many of them have to live through. We need to make sure that that gets highlighted even more in this legislation as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to make sure that we can support these brave parents who have come forward despite their grief to prevent this from happening to any other child.

I would now like to deal with the relative merit of Bills 13 and 14. At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to indicate that upon introduction of both of these bills into the Legislature on November 30, 2011, all parties sought

the opportunity to bring the two bills together, with a view to passing the strongest anti-bullying legislation possible. Yet without warning, the McGuinty Liberal government suddenly and unilaterally decided to bring Bill 13 forward for debate today, thereby preventing any possible merging of the bills.

In our view, this is renegeing on the original agreement and certainly speaks against what many members have talked about in the Legislature, about how we need to have the strongest bill possible and how we need to put them all together.

I'm disappointed in this, Mr. Speaker, principally because this did give us a true chance to merge these bills, and now we're not going to be able to. We're going to have to choose one bill over the other. People's attitudes get hardened one way or the other and it makes it even more difficult to try and work collaboratively in the spirit of this legislation, which is to bring forward a strong anti-bullying bill.

I think it's time to stop at this point for today, Mr. Speaker. Am I correct?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm reluctant to interrupt, but I must do so.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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