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Monday 2 April 2012

Lundi 2 avril 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 2 April 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 2 avril 2012

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Could we observe a moment of silence, please?

The House observed a moment's silence.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to welcome, on behalf of all members, the students who are here for the eighth annual Ontario Medical Association day. They're sitting above us here. They're with us for the day, and I hope you'll join them for lunch.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would also like to greet the Ontario Medical Students Association, in particular the co-chairs, Stephanie Kenny and Margaret Olszewski.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to recognize three friends in the gallery. I have Randy Aulbrook from New Liskeard and his wife, Carole, and our friend Darryl Wolk.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Mississauga-Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I would like to introduce two residents of Scarborough-Rouge River: Sandra and Joseph Jagmohan, the parents of page Victoria. They're here visiting the Legislature today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Forgive me. To correct the record, it is not Mississauga; it's Scarborough-Rouge River. I apologize.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to introduce the two MPPs for a day from the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga: McKenna Seebach from New Hamburg, who attends Forest Glen Public School and is in grade 6, and Hendrik Rolleman, also from New Hamburg, who attends Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School in grade 9. Welcome.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today the honorary consul of the Republic of Burundi, Mr. Howard Crosner. With him is his son, Daniel, who is in grade 5 at Royal St. George's College. I'd like to welcome him. He's aspiring to be a politician later on.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to introduce Olga and Mauro Manfredi, who are the parents of my L.A., Luca. They're in the west gallery. Welcome to the Legislature.

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

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To keep things somewhat light, the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell is celebrating a birthday today, so we wish him a happy birthday.

Applause.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that all members are to be permitted to wear pins in recognition of World Autism Awareness Day today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain has requested unanimous consent to wear the pins for recognition of autism day. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: The question is to the Premier. For some time, the Ontario PCs have been calling for a mandatory and legislated wage freeze for all public servants in the province of Ontario. You indicate that maybe we budged you.

Could you please tell me, in Bill 55, your budget bill, exactly what page your wage freeze is on?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted to receive the question and delighted to learn that my honourable colleague is, in fact, now taking a look at our budget. I think that's good news for his party and for Ontarians. I would remind my honourable colleague that for some time—his advice to us is that we need to address compensation issues, and we agree. In fact, more than half of the money that we spend in government is devoted to paying our public sector partners. So our commitment to Ontarians is that we will enter into collective bargaining with our public sector partners.

We've also made it clear that, should we not achieve the result that we need to achieve in order to abide by our fiscal plan, we'll then consider any and all measures necessary to ensure that that happens. But at the outset, I want to make it perfectly clear: Our intention is to respect the collective bargaining process in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess, there we have it. We heard the kind of wiggle words, to be polite, from the Premier—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Weasel words—not wiggle—weasel.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague says, “weasel words.” You said you would consider all legislative or regulatory options, I think, were your words, Premier.

I did get a chance to, of course, read your budget and your budget papers. We’ve looked through Bill 55. I assume you have as well, Premier, and that’s why you didn’t answer me directly.

It’s not in Bill 55. There is no mandatory legislative wage freeze. Your spinners may be saying that, but it’s not in your bill, and in your answer to my opening questions, you refused to say that you’re going to bring any mandatory legislative pay freeze.

So, Premier, who’s right? Are your spinners right? Are you backtracking now? Why are you using these kind of wiggle words on such an important initiative?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague in fact recognizes, but refuses to acknowledge, that there is a decision or two from the Supreme Court of Canada which mandate that we make a genuine and sincere effort to consult and to enter into collective bargaining with our partners. We are doing that.

I would remind my honourable colleague as well that there are many people who are paying attention to our budget, including those in finance and economic institutions. And I would remind my honourable colleague that we received support from the TD Bank, Scotiabank, Royal Bank, Dominion Bond Rating Service, BMO Nesbitt Burns, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Federation of Independent Business and Certified Management Accountants of Ontario.

They all recognize that it’s very important that we proceed to deal with compensation issues in a way that is firm, but they also like our approach, which is fair.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: On the second question of a number I’ll ask, I say the Premier is avoiding very direct questions. The Premier could not point out in his budget bill, Bill 55, what page the wage freeze is on because it doesn’t exist.

I’d ask the Premier back, then: If you don’t have it in your budget bill, can you point to exactly where in your budget papers or your budget speech you use the words “mandatory legislative pay freeze”?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I fully expect, given this line of questioning by my honourable colleague, that should it become necessary at some point in time for us to take advantage of other measures, I will have his support and the support of his party.

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But again, we believe, on this side of the House, that we have a responsibility to bargain fairly and firmly. We will do that, Speaker. Should those talks fail, then we’ll

look at other considerations. But we’ve made it clear from the outset. We have a specific plan in place. We will balance our budget by 2017-18, Speaker. Expenditures will rise by, on average, 1%—0.9 %, in fact, over the course of five years. We will do what is necessary to make sure that happens.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, Speaker: so, obviously a lot of wiggling, a lot of waffling, a lot of dancing from the Premier. Despite this stage-managed tough talk, you have no pay freeze in your bill, in your budget. I guess the Premier’s policy is: a wage freeze if necessary, but not necessarily a wage freeze. That’s the kind of lacklustre leadership we’re seeing from the Premier on this issue.

Our position is clear: a mandatory public sector wage freeze—no exceptions, no special deals, across the board. It will save \$2 billion. Premier, if you actually now believe in our position—and I don’t think you do—why are you using so many wiggle words in your rhetoric? Is that your position—a wage freeze if necessary sometime down the road but not necessarily a wage freeze?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it may be that my honourable colleague has a plan for us to consider, and if he does, I’d be pleased to take a look at that. He might want to recommend me to specific pages of that particular plan, Speaker. But the fact of the matter is, they do not have a plan. We have a plan. It is thoughtful; it is responsible; it is prudent.

I would recommend to my honourable colleague page 69 and the ensuing pages, where we talk about a long-term plan for public sector compensation. We talk about bringing a balanced approach, Speaker, that respects the collective bargaining process, an approach that is “consistent with the protections afforded to collective bargaining under the Supreme Court of Canada’s interpretation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

I also draw to my honourable colleague’s attention that our fiscal plan provides no funding for incremental compensation increases for new collective agreements, Speaker. We make it perfectly clear that we intend to hold the line, and again I say to my honourable colleague that, should we ever require his support, we look forward to that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, that excerpt you just read on no additional compensation was the exact same thing, word for word, you had in your 2010 budget, and it was a dramatic failure—word for word. It was a simple cut and paste.

Premier, I did get a chance to read through the pages that you referenced. My pink and yellow highlighting is here. I’ll point you to page 74, the pages you reference and obviously have read. You say that you will “reach responsible settlements that are respectful of fiscal realities and also maintain vital public services.” You

would make a bureaucrat blush with that kind of soft language.

Mr. Speaker, not only do we need a wage freeze in this province; we need a wiggle freeze so we can actually nail the Premier down on where they stand on this issue.

So, Premier, you referenced page 68 and subsequent pages. Please point out, then, on page 68 and subsequent pages where you say “public sector wage freeze.”

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think we need to acknowledge and accept that my honourable colleague will be less than happy with any language, any approach, any initiative and any plan that was less than mean-spirited and vindictive and that found a way to attack our public servants. That’s not how we work on this side of the House, Speaker. We believe in respecting the collective bargaining process. We believe in acknowledging and respecting a Supreme Court of Canada decision. We also feel a strong sense of accountability that we owe to all Ontarians, who are counting on us to get this done, counting on us to balance the budget. We will do what is necessary, Speaker, to make that happen.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: So, Speaker, I guess we revealed in short order here that when it comes to a so-called wage freeze, the emperor has no clothes. It’s not in your bill. It’s not in your budget papers, and you’ve actually refused to use the words, Premier, “mandatory, legislated pay freeze.”

You say, what kind of language would I be satisfied with? Well, Prime Minister David Cameron in the UK said he is asking the public sector to include a two-year pay freeze—clear language. President Barack Obama, in bringing forward his legislation, said he is proposing a two-year pay freeze for all civilian federal workers. British Columbia brought forward legislation.

Sir, you asked what kind of language I want. I’d like clear, direct language that actually tells us where you stand.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No wiggles.

Mr. Tim Hudak: There are lots of examples. So, no more wiggling.

Where do we stand, Speaker? A mandatory public sector wage freeze for all of us to save \$2 billion—it’ll work. Why don’t you believe in that, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We saw what that kind of approach got us during the Mike Harris years. We saw what that did to our public services. We saw what that did to our schools and to the education that afforded our children. We saw what that did to our health care system and how Ontario patients suffered as a result. We witnessed the hospital closures that ensued. We witnessed the endless strife that took place inside our publicly

funded school system. That’s their choice. I’ll leave it to them to prosecute that kind of an approach.

We have a decidedly different, respectful, determined, fair, balanced approach, in keeping with the values shared by Ontario families.

Interjections.

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

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Over the past six days, families in Ontario have been sharing their thoughts about the budget, and I want to share a few with the Premier.

Dawn from Fort Erie says, “We are already struggling in a town where there [are] no jobs ... as the one last work industry is being closed. First they want to take jobs out of communities and then expect the people to live on less.”

The Premier has proposed a fund to distribute grants to business, but Ontario families have seen companies take handouts before and ship jobs away. My question is: Is the government ready to ensure that we’re rewarding the job creators who will actually help women like Dawn find a job?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague, and I appreciate her thoughtful and considered approach.

A big dimension of our budget has to do with jobs: creating more jobs and building a stronger foundation for growth and prosperity. Specifically when it comes to investments in infrastructure, hospital investments in infrastructure will create 26,000 jobs per year for three years, on average. Our investment in post-secondary infrastructure creates 3,000 jobs per year for the next three years, on average. Our investment in the Pan Am athletes’ village creates 5,200 jobs.

The northern Ontario heritage fund is to support 17,800 jobs. The eastern Ontario development fund, 1,900 jobs; our modernization of the gaming sector, 2,300 net new jobs, and another 4,000 new jobs in the hospitality and retail sectors—this budget is a lot to do with jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Listening to people and their priorities is very important. Daniel from LaSalle writes that he’s concerned there’s “no new job creation” in the budget, adding that the government “promised that there would be more jobs with [the] HST.”

With their HST and corporate tax scheme, the government promised 600,000 new jobs. Today, 600,000 Ontarians are looking for work.

Is the Premier ready to admit that their no-strings-attached corporate giveaways haven’t been working and that people like Daniel need to see a more effective jobs strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to remind my honourable colleague that, just last week, we announced—actually, it was announced by the private sector—that

Toyota was creating 400 new jobs; Ford, 100 new jobs; GM, 300 new jobs. In each of those instances, those were the subject of continuing economic partnerships with the people of Ontario through the government. So I'd recommend to my honourable colleague that she recognize that, from time to time, these partnerships in fact work.

I also want to draw to my honourable colleague's attention the fact that we're creating a new jobs and prosperity fund. We're taking a look at all the ways that we've been supporting economic development in Ontario. We want to lend greater focus to those dollars and ensure that we're doing it in a way that creates jobs and enhances productivity in Ontario, which is a challenge for us.

So I say again to my honourable colleague: A big part of this budget has to do with jobs.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That's not the way Ontarians see it, Mr. Speaker, and that's not the way New Democrats see it.

Nicholas from New Liskeard writes, "I think the budget does nothing for northern Ontario, where jobs are very hard to find and things like hydro and gas are getting more expensive with every day. And on top of this the sale of the Ontario Northland hurts the north even more; more jobs will be lost and not replaced."

People feel like they're falling behind. They want to see smart investments in infrastructure and real incentives to help companies that will actually create jobs. Instead, they see giveaway after giveaway after giveaway to companies that are simply shipping jobs away and, especially in the north, shipping resources away, too.

Does the Premier think his jobs plan is good enough for northerners like Nicholas?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again I say to my honourable colleague a few things. First of all, Toyota, GM, Ford and others are not shipping their jobs away; they're creating them right here.

Our budget commits to creating or protecting some 170,000 jobs. Over the course of the next three years, we're investing over \$30 billion in new infrastructure in Ontario, and I outlined just a moment ago where it is that we're going to make those investments.

I say to my honourable colleague, we would be more than willing to work with her as we lend shape to our new jobs and prosperity fund to make sure that it does exactly what we want it to do: to create jobs here, jobs that last, good jobs here in the province of Ontario, and also to ensure that we are improving our productivity as an economy generally, Speaker. That's the way for us to go. There's a broad consensus in that area, and I'm sure that we could work with my honourable colleague and all my colleagues opposite in that regard.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier as well. I'm hearing from people all across the

province, and northern Ontarians are particularly concerned. As usual, the ripple effects of decisions that are made in Toronto have far-reaching impacts in the north.

Irene from Englehart wrote to say that the "McGuinty government seems to forget about northern Ontario. Whenever there are cuts, we northerners suffer." Suzanne from Virginiatown is concerned about access to health care.

What does the Premier have to say to northerners like Irene and Suzanne who feel threatened by the cuts to their way of life?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the perspective shared by my honourable colleague, but I cannot accept it.

If you take a look at any number of areas, whether it's the northern Ontario heritage fund—which, by the way, we have carved out of that plan to establish a larger jobs and prosperity fund. We want to protect the northern Ontario heritage fund. It has proved to be very successful in terms of leveraging public dollars to land new investment and create thousands and thousands of jobs.

I'll remind my honourable colleague about our investment in a new medical school in northern Ontario, Speaker, with a campus shared by Thunder Bay and Sudbury. We're turning out our new graduates now, who are demonstrating a strong commitment and attachment to practising medicine in northern Ontario.

Interjection: A new law school.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've got a new law school that we're building in northern Ontario; a new school of architecture that we're investing in Ontario. We have a special electricity rate for northern Ontario.

There are a number of ways we continue to demonstrate our abiding commitment to the people of northern Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The comments I'm raising are not just my perspective; they're the perspective of Ontarians, particularly those in the north.

Northerners are very, very worried, Speaker, about the economic prospects in the north. They're worried about the impact of the privatization of Ontario Northland, a vital, vital transportation link. They are justifiably frustrated, and have been for quite some time.

John from North Bay wrote to say that he doesn't appreciate "cutting jobs and services on the back of northern Ontario." What does the Premier have to say to northerners like John who are already having trouble making ends meet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we can no longer afford to subsidize the ONTC. It was not an easy decision, but I think we need to be straight with the people who are affected by this particular service. We're going to divest it. We're going to work with the private sector and ensure that the necessary transportation options continue to be available to people in northern Ontario.

But I think there are all kinds of reasons to be optimistic about the future in the north. You know, I've learned

that last year was our best year ever when it comes to mining—over a billion new dollars invested in our mining sector. We've got the biggest mining sector in all of Canada.

We also understand that by working together with people in the north—and the Ring of Fire opportunity, Speaker. That represents the single biggest mining opportunity in Canada in over 100 years. We're convinced that we're going to garner billions of dollars of new investment and thousands of new jobs.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this Premier knows that around the world, transit systems are subsidized by governments because it's about moving people around. Northerners deserve to be moved around across their communities as well. They're not asking for more; they're just asking for an equal share.

Diane from Cochrane wrote to say that she can't help but feel that "northern Ontario appears to be less important to the McGuinty government." Her concern is serious, Speaker, and it is legitimate. She writes, "Help us to keep our jobs and continue to provide service to northern Ontario citizens." Will the Premier listen to northerners like Diane?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think I've made it clear in my first two answers, by listing some of the specific initiatives that we have pursued, that we have a very strong commitment to northern Ontario.

Again, on the matter of the ONTC, it was not an easy decision. I think the extent of the subsidy—some \$400 per passenger—was simply something that we could no longer afford.

What we intend to do instead, Speaker, is to continue to invest in good schools in northern Ontario and good health care in northern Ontario. We will continue to invest in good highways in northern Ontario. We will continue to invest in a new school of architecture and a new law school in northern Ontario. We will continue to invest in a thriving mining sector in northern Ontario.

Again, we continue to find ways to invest and support a great quality of life and a strong future for northern Ontario.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, in the past you've insisted that there's a constitutional impediment to a legislated public sector wage freeze; in fact, we heard the same thing from the Premier today as he tried to wriggle out of committing to one. But on page 1 of your department's news release dated March 27, you said, "Where agreements cannot be negotiated that are consistent with the plan to balance the budget and protect priority services, the government is prepared to propose the necessary administrative and legislative measures." Unfortunately, Minister, the details of this aren't contained in the actual budget. So would you please be clear with us now: Are you or are you not prepared to legislate a public sector wage freeze?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The budget itself is clear. The Premier's answer today is clear. We are working hard with our partners at the bargaining table. We have built into the fiscal plan numbers that see zero and zero. We've given mandates to the teachers' table, as well as our negotiations with the Ontario Medical Association. We are taking a balanced, reasonable approach that respects the Constitution and decisions taken in the Constitution, respects collective bargaining, respects the people on the other side of the table.

Mr. Speaker, this is the right approach. The numbers built into the budget contemplate zero and zero. We've laid out a plan to do it. There's no plan from that side of the House. Our plan is the right plan for Ontario, for a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Well, with respect, that response is about as clear as mud. You've baffled the public, you're trying to baffle the opposition and I really think you've just confused yourself.

Both the Supreme Court of Canada, as you should know, and the Ontario Superior Court recognize that a public sector wage freeze can be legislated under pressing fiscal circumstances. With credit agencies breathing down our neck and with interest payments now our third-largest expenditure, it's very clear that Ontario is in dire economic circumstances. That's all not to mention the fact that Ontario's debt is three times higher than all other provincial deficits combined.

Minister, the constitutional myth has been debunked. You cannot hide behind it anymore. Ontarians deserve an answer. Will you legislate a public sector wage freeze? Yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there's a reason the federal finance minister didn't legislate wage freezes. He understands the Constitution.

The Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The purpose of me standing is not to give people silence to keep jabbing.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On both sides.

Minister.

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition wants us to do what Barack Obama has allegedly done, and David Cameron. Unfortunately, they're not subject to the Supreme Court of Canada rulings. We've laid out a careful plan that respects those decisions. We've sought legal advice on all of these matters. We're respecting collective bargaining. We will take the appropriate steps—

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

POWER PLANT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. On Friday, EIG Management, an investor in the

Greenfield power plant project in Mississauga, announced it was suing the Ontario government for \$300 million. The reason? Breach of contract, after your government, Premier, cancelled the Greenfield gas-fired power plant in the middle of an election campaign.

How much more, Premier, will your decision cost the public?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We intend to vigorously defend the statement of claim and the demand for damages brought by EIG. The Ontario Power Authority and Greenfield are continuing to have discussions about the relocation of this particular plant.

We were pleased to have the support of the NDP when the decision was made, and we thank the member for that.

Further comment wouldn't be appropriate because this matter is before the courts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, Speaker, given that the Premier made the announcement, I think it would be incumbent on the Premier to actually answer this question.

In the court file, EIG alleged it was not given any warning that the gas plant was being cancelled until Premier Dalton McGuinty himself made the announcement in the middle of last fall's election campaign. According to the company, "There was no prior discussion or arrangement with respect to this announcement with either EIG or, to its knowledge, Greenfield."

Why can't the Premier give the public a sense of how much their last-ditch Liberal seat-saver decision is going to cost?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We were pleased to have the support of the NDP when the decision was made. And, as I recall, we were pleased to have the support of the opposition when the decision was made.

We will vigorously defend the statement of claim and damages issued by EIG, as everyone would expect that we would. There are ongoing discussions involving the Ontario Power Authority and Greenfield about relocating this particular plant.

It's appropriate we have reliable supply for all of the residents, and that's exactly what we intend to do.

MUNICIPALITIES

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, last Tuesday the government tabled its budget, and it was a budget full of hard but very necessary decisions. There are more than 444 great municipalities in Ontario, including the two I represent in Pickering-Scarborough East. Minister, these municipalities are very dependent on our government support to deliver their services.

Speaker, will the minister please tell this House what the budget's impact on Ontario's municipalities is, and if the uploading of municipal costs will continue, given the tough choices that have to be made?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think everyone here knows that eliminating the deficit is the most important

thing we can do to move to economic growth. I want to assure my colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East, and all Ontarians, that nothing has changed. We are committed to honouring the promise that we made to our municipal partners. We will continue to upload services. We know we all have a role to play in the budget, and over the next three years, we will find savings. However, the municipal uploads will continue, Mr. Speaker. They're ongoing. They're on track, and that will mean \$1.5 billion more for our municipalities by 2018.

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, the heckling from the other side suggests that there's no support for this, but I really believe that the worst thing that could happen for Ontarians right now is an election, Mr. Speaker. What we need is, we need support. We need to continue to work with our municipalities in a way that the members opposite never knew how to do. We need this budget to pass so we can upload those services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Minister. It's great to hear that municipal uploading will continue and will in no way affect our efforts to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18.

Minister, you mentioned in your comments that the government is working with municipal partners in order to move forward and confront the challenges ahead. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: With the challenges that the proposed budget is attempting to face, will we continue to work as closely with our municipal partners as we have in the past?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think one of the most important things that a provincial government can do is to work co-operatively and collaboratively with municipalities so the 444 municipalities in this province know that they have a partner in this provincial government. That's why we're uploading the services that were downloaded by the previous government.

I have a couple of quotes. Gary McNamara, who is the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, says this: "Looking at the uploads, we are very pleased to see that being maintained." A friend of the government, I will say, Mr. Jim Watson, the mayor of Ottawa—here's what he says: "The government is honouring their commitment to keep the upload agreement in place.... We really put our lobbying efforts into the upload and also to make sure infrastructure projects they're already committed to continue to be funded."

Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue—

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

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. For the past several weeks, the Minister of Health has been saying that the reason she shouldn't resign over the Ornge scandal is because she took decisive action to remove the board. But at last week's public accounts

committee, we learned that she did not remove the board. When asked why, after months of doing nothing, the minister was suddenly able to intervene at Ornge, the Deputy Minister of Health shocked us by saying, “the voluntary resignation of the board.”

The deputy minister’s statement stands in stark contrast to that of the minister and further erodes public confidence. Will the Premier hold the minister accountable and ask for her resignation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know the members of the opposition have put this very same question to both my honourable colleague the Minister of Health and myself on several occasions. My answer has not changed. I continue to have great confidence in Minister Matthews and the work that she is doing. We’ve spoken at length about her response, and I believe it was concrete, it was decisive and it did what needed to be done in terms of giving effect to the public interest.

I also want to remind my honourable colleague that Minister Matthews is not here today, for example, because she’s out doing the people’s work. She is, in fact, moving ahead with our action plan to transform health care in Ontario, which includes ensuring that we move more of the funding away from hospital-based care into home care and that we do other things to ensure that we continue to improve the quality of care for all our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. That’s correct, thank you.

Now, the tradition in this place is not to reference any attendance, regardless of whether or not it’s one from one side or one from the other side. I would remind the Premier not to mention someone’s attendance in this House.

I also want to take a moment to ask you to use your inside voices. We’re getting into that yelling across at each other to try to drown each other out, and I would appreciate listening carefully to the answers.

Members should know that they are to be in their own seats if they are to make any response in this House.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Again to the Premier: Last Thursday, the Minister of Health said, “If I had known that the leadership at Ornge was going to create this remarkable web that would fill their pockets ... I would have acted sooner.”

Mr. Speaker, she did know, but she didn’t respond to any of the red flags that she did see.

So I ask you today: In light of the fact that this minister seems to be very confused about what she did and didn’t do, in light of the fact that she ignored many of the red flags and the Auditor General has told us there was no oversight at Ornge, will the Premier now do the reasonable and honourable thing and ask for her resignation?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I say to my honourable colleague, no, I will not. I continue to have great confidence in Minister Matthews and the way that she continues to carry out her responsibilities. My honour-

able colleague knows that we have now learned that a number of members of the opposition parties were in fact fully briefed about some of the events that were unfolding at Ornge.

I continue to have confidence in Minister Matthews. She has acted in a decisive and thorough way. She brought in a team of forensic accountants. It has culminated in her sending the matter to the OPP. She has introduced new legislation that brings stronger oversight to bear over these kinds of activities. She has entered into a new performance agreement with the people at Ornge, all with a view to ensuring that we have in place the necessary oversight and controls and that we continue to protect the best quality of care for Ontarians.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. On March 21, the Minister of Health was asked if there were any red flags in the January 2011 letter from Ornge. The minister said, “Were there” red “flags? Yes, of course we continue to do the work. It eventually built up to the point where I called in a forensic audit team...”

But, on March 28, the very same question is asked. The minister’s story changes. She denied seeing any red flags or doing anything about it. Does the Premier follow the Minister of Health’s shifting story? Because I have a hard time with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

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

Hon. John Milloy: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has had an opportunity to testify before the public accounts committee last week. I would point out that she was originally asked to come for one hour and in fact stayed two and a half hours so that she could talk about the action that she and the government have taken in terms of Ornge—action which has led to the replacement of the board, which has led to the replacement of the CEO. We have an acting CEO who is also there. She called in the forensic auditors. She called in the OPP. She replaced the performance agreement. There has been tough, new legislation that has been put forward.

We see the public accounts committee as an opportunity for the government and for representatives of the new administration of Ornge to talk about the decisive action that we’ve taken. We see these opportunities—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier. Well, the Premier’s Minister of Health can’t even get her own story straight. First, the opposition was assured that they were looking into Ornge, but that nothing was wrong—that they were stonewalled. Then she says that she was misled and there were facts that were hidden, and then that there were red flags but that it was everybody else’s fault. Now, we’re not really sure what story to believe. Why is the Premier letting the Minister of Health keep her job?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as I say, we are committed, on this side of the House, to full transparency.

That's why the minister and other senior officials went in front of public accounts. That's also why the government has put forward a series of motions asking for opposition members to come forward in front of the public accounts committee to talk about what they knew and the red flags that they received, red flags that we know the New Democratic Party had—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This is an interesting situation you've put me in. I'm hearing heckling from the side that is giving the answer and I'm hearing heckling from this side about somebody over in the corner. It's not helpful to all of us who are trying to hear.

Minister.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the government has put forward a series of motions. For example, we recently learned that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, in June 2010, had a two-hour tour of Ornge which was facilitated by one Kelly Mitchell, a high-priced Tory lobbyist. We look forward to the opportunity, at the public accounts committee, to talk about the red flags that he received, the red flags that many of his colleagues and many—

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

EDUCATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, through you, is to the Minister of Education. The government tabled its budget for the upcoming year last week. I know that there were some tough decisions to be made, but the single most important step we can take to grow the economy is to balance the budget, which we're on track to do, for 2017-18. The government has restored public confidence in education, after years of neglect by the previous PC government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell this House how she will protect the progress that we've made in education in Ontario in this fiscal climate?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I thank the member for the question, and in particular I thank the member from Scarborough Southwest for his advocacy on behalf of families in his community.

Speaker, in this budget, we made a conscious choice to protect the gains that Ontario had made in education: to protect full-day kindergarten, to keep our class sizes small and to keep more classroom teachers to ensure that our students could get everything that they needed inside the classroom. Our decisions struck a really careful balance and have found savings outside the classroom.

Last week, when we announced the funding for school boards, called the grants for student needs—the grants for student needs will be stable at \$21 billion. That preserves a \$6.5-billion, or 45%, increase to board funding since 2003.

We are proud of the gains that we have made in education, and we will keep moving forward—

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

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you to the minister for that response. In my riding, I've noticed that education is one of the most important things to my constituents. I understand that the grants for student needs have risen slightly this year.

In spite of that, I have constituents that are concerned about education funding. I know that people in my riding and across the province would like to better understand the impact of the budget on schools. Minister, what would you say to the people of my riding that have these concerns?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I have more good news, because for our students, funding will rise slightly this year to \$11,189 per pupil, up about \$4,000, or 55%, since we came to office.

Speaker, full-day kindergarten is not funded through grants for student needs. So, while we have stabilization of funding through the GSN, we will see an increase of about 1.5% this year, as a result of increased investments in all-day learning.

In spite of challenging economic times, we've protected the gains that we've made in education, we're keeping funding stable, and we are putting forward a clear choice to invest in our classrooms, support student achievement and smaller class sizes, and keep teachers in our classrooms.

I'm disappointed in the opposition, Speaker, because they've been talking about forcing an unnecessary election. I can tell you, for the families in Ontario that want to see education continue to succeed, that is the very last thing—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: The next time he will be asked to remove himself from the spot that he's not supposed to be in to heckle.

The member from Nipissing: New question.

POWER PLANT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question this morning is for the Minister of Energy. On Friday we learned that the US-based financing company for the Mississauga power plant has launched a \$300-million lawsuit against the Liberal government for the cancellation of the project, citing “breach of contract and conspiracy.”

First you cancelled the Oakville power plant for purely political reasons; then, in the midst of the election, you cancelled the Mississauga power plant in what was widely viewed as a seat-saver program. Minister, will you now come clean with the Ontario taxpayers and tell us the true cost of cancelling these projects?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We were pleased to read, back during the campaign, on October 1 in the London Free Press, that the “PCs don't support building it,” meaning the gas plant, so we're pleased to have that support on the record.

We're vigorously defending the statement of claim that EIG has issued. People are entitled to access to the courts, and we're entitled to our day and to vigorously defend it. We'll do that on behalf of the people of Ontario, and hopefully we'll have the support of the opposition in doing that.

The Ontario Power Authority and Greenfield are continuing to have discussions about the options that are available in this matter. Those discussions will go on. In the meantime, Speaker, we'll make sure that the people of Ontario—Mississauga, Etobicoke—have reliable power on which they can—

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

1120

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, the statement of claim filed by EIG Management says, "There was no prior discussion or arrangement with respect to this announcement with either EIG, or to its knowledge, Greenfield." It also alleges the government and the OPA "conspired" to help stop the power plant and ensure it never became operational as intended by the agreement.

Minister, as this is likely the first in a long series of lawsuits that we can expect, isn't this lawsuit proof positive that your decision had nothing to do with our energy needs, but only satisfied the Liberals' political needs?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's funny how the mind seems to drift in a few months, because during the election, they didn't want to build it; they supported our decision. Now, we get a little wiggle and a waffle. We're not really sure now.

Let's be very clear. We're vigorously defending the claim. We've asked for the support of the loyal opposition in vigorously defending the claim. I'm sure over the next weeks and months, my friend's going to read all sorts of allegations which are only that. They're unproven. They're not tested. They don't stand up.

We're going to vigorously defend the claim on behalf of the people of Ontario, and we really do appreciate the support the opposition has given for the cancellation and not building that particular gas plant.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. My constituent Beth Edwards has an 18-year-old son with autism. Beth is here in the gallery today. Taylor has been in hospital for four months while the family awaits placement for him to a group home. Taylor has violent outbursts, and Beth and her husband fear for the safety of their seven-year-old son.

Speaker, an \$800-a-day hospital bed is not the proper place for someone who doesn't need acute care. What will this minister do for Taylor and the hundreds of other young people like him who are languishing on wait-lists for care?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very aware of this case through media reports and MPP inquiries as the individual in question—due to the age, it actually falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Of course, I express my sympathies, and I think the sympathies of all members with the challenges that the family is facing.

As I say, the member has brought this case forward, but at the same time I think he realizes that as minister, it would be inappropriate for me to discuss the specifics of a case. But as always, we work with families in these situations to make sure that they have access to all the services that are available to them. We try to work with them to find a solution to, obviously, a very challenging situation.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly express my sympathies to the family.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, no one on that side of the House has worked with this family at all.

Today is world autism day. Awareness of autism spectrum disorder increases each and every day, and treatment methods continuously improve. Instead of improving services, this government has chosen instead to close facilities like Thistletown.

Last week, I wrote to two ministers asking them to intervene in this case. What Taylor needs urgently is care in an appropriate setting now. Why won't this government do the right thing for this family and countless other families and immediately provide the care that Taylor and others so desperately need?

Hon. John Milloy: As in all cases, the Ministry of Community and Social Services or, if relevant, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services—officials with that ministry work with families to assess the needs of the individual and to find out what are the options in terms of care moving forward.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on the specifics of a case, but please, all members need to be assured that we explore every avenue to make sure that individuals know what options are available and what services are there.

When working with any clients or families, we certainly explore every opportunity. We present families with options. Rightly so, they have the opportunity to accept those options or ask us to continue looking for them.

Mr. Speaker, we are co-operating with all families who are in this situation and making sure that they have access to the full—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, I've heard from several agriculture students at the University of

Guelph. They want to know if there was clear support for agriculture in the budget that was introduced last week. I was pleased to see that though your ministry will be looking to find efficiencies in administration and service delivery, support for farmers remains strong. I know that a lot of farmers are pleased that the budget continues to support agriculture, despite the turbulent economic times.

Through you, Speaker: Minister, can you share the response that the agricultural community has given over the support for agriculture in the budget?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I sure can. In fact, I'm very, very proud of the response of the agricultural community. I'm delighted to report that in the Simcoe Reformer, Mark Wales, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, had this to say: "It's good to see that agriculture is getting this kind of support."

Speaker, I want every member of this Legislative Assembly to know that our government is committed to working with the entire value chain, agri-chain, to seize the potential to further develop the agricultural sector and to build an even stronger agricultural sector in this great province of ours.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Minister, I know that many of the farmers were also watching the budget to see what would happen to the risk management program that we delivered for them in the 2011 budget. This is an important program, one that gives farmers the predictability they need. I know that farm groups who met with me were certainly very anxious that risk management continue.

Minister, this year's budget maintains support for risk management programs while also initiating a conversation with agricultural stakeholders on how to make the program predictable for government as well.

Speaker, through you, could the minister provide this House with the reaction of farmers and farm leaders to the continuation of the risk management program in our budget?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to respond to that great question. I thank the member from Guelph for it.

Here's what the Christian Farmers of Ontario stated. Their president, Lorne Small, said, "Ontario's farm organizations and government have worked hard to develop this program and the CFFO is willing to work equally hard at making the necessary changes. We believe that the program should meet both the needs of farmers and the new reality of the province's financial situation."

Mr. Speaker, we worked hard with our agri-sector partners to build this program, and we'll work hard to make sure it is a wonderful indicator of our success in agriculture in Ontario going forward.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. The budget does nothing to slow the ballooning deficit of this province. As Drummond predicted, we are heading for a \$30-billion deficit.

Your budget does nothing to create jobs. As Jack Mintz points out, the freeze on corporate tax rates will actually cost us 30,000 jobs.

What's worse, your budget threatens to jeopardize resource sectors, which are so vital to Ontario's future. Threatening increases in mining taxes and adding mining to the water-taking permit process sends all the wrong signals to industry.

Premier, just how much more do you plan to squeeze out of the mining sector to fuel your spending addiction?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that Ontario has the lowest royalties and mining taxes in Canada. That is simply a fact, like so many others, that the official opposition chooses to ignore.

Let's just take a look at what some other people have said about our budgets. "We strongly support their efforts to eliminate the deficit." That's Janet Ecker, president of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance. There's a former Ontario finance minister who actually knows what she's talking about, unlike certain others who can't seem to keep themselves under control.

1130

We welcome the support of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and a variety of others whom I'll quote from. I'm proud that Ontario is—

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Premier: Last week, we had more of an instance of how you manage the resource sector. You actually paid a business \$3.5 million to go away because you've shirked your responsibility to consult. You've closed half of the north to exploration. You won't take the lead on your obligation to consult with First Nations. You won't move ahead on the Ring of Fire, the richest resource find in recent history, and you're about to stick it to industry again, just like you did when you added the diamond tax.

So my question to the Premier: Why would any mining company even think about coming to Ontario when Quebec has put out the welcome mat with their Plan Nord?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There's a simple answer to that question: because it's the best jurisdiction in the world to invest in. That's why we have \$1 billion worth of exploration taking place in the province of Ontario. That's why we have more mining companies—I believe that last year there were 249 companies investing in exploration here—more than any other province in the country. That's why jurisdictions all over the world see Ontario as the premier place to invest in, and that's why the president of the Ontario Mining Association said that he was very, very satisfied with the budget that was presented last week.

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. On February 1, Minister Chan announced the closure of Ontario Place and the appointment of an advisory panel to recommend its future. Part of the announcement was a pre-budget retraction of funding for this popular venue. The minister has ensured that the public will not have direct contact with his advisory panel by requiring all input, including that of MPPs, to be vetted through his ministry.

Will the Premier tell his minister to open the process, at least giving a nod to transparency, and ensure that all Ontarians have direct access to the advisory panel?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thanks very much to the honourable member for the question. We have engaged the opposition member. As well as that, we have listened to the opposition member and suggested to him that he should engage the advisory panel.

We are moving aggressively forward to kick-start the revitalization of Ontario Place. Our aim is to make Ontario Place a must-visit destination and landmark for Ontario families and tourists from around the world. We are transforming Ontario Place so it can realize its full potential and economic potential as a signature landmark in Ontario. A new Ontario Place is part of our government's plan to grow tourism through investment and to stimulate our economy, create jobs and develop new opportunity and experience for tourists.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister, I've heard a bunch of rumours around the neighbourhood that Premier Dad has a gambling addiction, and that instead of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member knows that that's not an appropriate title.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I heard that the Premier has a gambling addiction, and that, instead of taking his kids to Ontario Place, which is a beautiful park, he's going to the casino. Needless to say, I am worried, and families are incredibly worried, about him and the government. Even Dr. Kevin Stolarick, a director of the Martin Prosperity Institute, told us at a meeting that the social costs are two to eight times higher than the presumed benefits.

Should the rumours be true that the government is skulking about with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. to create a casino at Ontario Place, will you at least commit to have a referendum so people can have a say?

Hon. Michael Chan: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I appreciate the honourable member's question. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: We would have full opportunity for participation by all Ontarians, all citizens of the GTA, in any decision or potential decision.

The member opposite was part of a government that brought casino gaming to Ontario. I know he supported that at the time. His federal colleague Mr. Comartin has a bill before the Senate—it has been passed by the House—

supported by all New Democrats, welcoming sports betting into our resort casinos. I think Mr. Comartin has shown real leadership and courage on that issue and has had a consistent position on casino gaming throughout his career.

I wouldn't suggest that my friend opposite is being inconsistent, but there will be a lot of opportunity for all members of the public to participate, and we look—

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

MÉTIS NATION

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Many Ontarians, including many of my constituents in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, when learning about the history of the Métis people here in Canada, only learn about the community's contribution in Manitoba. However, it's important to recognize that right here there's a significant Métis presence and population in Ontario.

Last fall it was an honour for me to attend the Louis Riel Day celebrations here at Queen's Park. I, like many others, learned a lot about the contributions of our Métis to our country, more specifically here in Ontario.

Speaker, I believe it's important that we all become aware of the significant role of the Métis in Ontario's rich heritage, and recognize their important contributions. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs please tell us what our government is doing to recognize the contributions of the Métis people and to celebrate their distinct culture and heritage?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really appreciate the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell asking a question and recognizing the importance of Métis culture in Ontario. I agree with him that it's really important that we recognize the unique contributions that Métis people have made to Ontario. That's why we tabled the motion in the Ontario Legislature recognizing 2010 as the Year of the Métis and the unique history that the Métis people have lived in Ontario.

This past November 17 marked the third anniversary of the signing of the historic framework agreement between the Ontario government and the Métis Nation of Ontario. That agreement signified a new way of doing business with Métis people. We really recognize that economic development is the cornerstone of that relationship, and that's why, last June, my colleague Minister Bentley, the former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, announced that the Ontario government is providing up to \$30 million over 10 years to the Métis Voyageur development fund to support Métis economic development.

There's a lot we're doing, Mr. Speaker. I know you have a personal and avid interest in this subject, and I think it's something that we all need to more aware of.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, contingent with the standing House rules, I rise to correct my record, in part of the answer.

While Mr. Small had many good things to say about our government and such, the quote I attributed to him should properly be attributed to Nathan Stevens, their director of policy development. So I want to correct the record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As the member knows, that is a point of order. All members have the opportunity to correct their record, and I thank the member for doing so.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to introduce to members of the House—in the gallery today we have a city councillor from my riding of Nepean–Carleton, a city councillor from the city of Ottawa, Scott Moffatt. He's one of the youngest city councillors in Ottawa. He is joined also in the gallery by the executive director of the business improvement area in Bells Corners in Nepean–Carleton, Alex Lewis, who is very excited to have been introduced.

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

Mr. David Zimmer: Oh, no.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd better explain that. The member for Willowdale is not standing to introduce a visitor.

Further introductions?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd also like to welcome for the afternoon session our MPPs for the day, McKenna Seebach and Hendrik Rolleman. Welcome, and enjoy the afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his introduction.

The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm waiting for my constituents, or at least they're citizens of Ontario: Dr. John Astles, Dr. Jeff Goodhew and Dr. Lareina Yeung, who are with the Ontario Association of Optometrists. They're with us today and I'll be introducing a private member's bill on their behalf.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MPP FOR A DAY

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to share with you today the details of my new MPP for a Day program in Kitchener–Conestoga. As part of my local election platform, I committed to establishing an MPP for a Day

program to provide local youth with an opportunity to experience provincial government first-hand.

I'm happy to report that today is the official launch of our MPP for a Day program. I'd like to welcome MPPs for the day McKenna Seebach and Hendrik Rolleman.

Here's how the program works: Every month the Legislature sits one grade 6 or 7 student and one grade 8, 9 or 10 student will be selected to come to Queen's Park to experience a day in the life of an MPP. As MPPs for the day, they will be introduced in the Legislature, attend question period, take a special tour of Queen's Park, sit in meetings, attend receptions, as well as receive a certificate recognizing their time as MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Interested students can visit my website at michaelharrismpp.ca to download an application. For students in grades 6 and 7, the application asks six questions, such as why would they be good as an MPP for a day. For students in grades 8, 9 and 10, there are eight questions, one of which asks, "If you could change one thing in Ontario today, what would it be?"

The goal of this program is to further help youth involvement in our community and to encourage tomorrow's new leaders.

ESSEX 73'S

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is in the light of good sportsmanship that I am pleased to congratulate the Essex 73's on their 16th Great Lakes Junior C Championship last night, March 27—well, it wouldn't be last night, but 2012—against the Belle River Canadiens with a 3-1 victory at a packed arena with attendance of 1,136 people.

They'll now go on to the Schmalz Cup. This is their 39th season that they've been competing—since 1973. They have also had six Schmalz Cup wins and have competed in 11 all-Ontario Junior C Championships. They are the most successful team in Junior C in all of Ontario.

Gil Langlois is head coach and Scott Miller, general manager, and the team, I want to congratulate them.

It's particularly difficult for me, Mr. Speaker, as a former Belle River Canadien, having played minor hockey in Belle River and knowing the enormous rivalry that there is between Belle River and Essex. I stand here today as a humble former Canadien and I wish them the utmost congratulations on their efforts. Congratulations, and best wishes as they continue through to the Schmalz Cup.

VOLUNTEERS

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to be able to rise today in the House and issue a thank you to our volunteers who give so generously of their time and efforts to make all our communities a better place to live, and in particular for me in Etobicoke, with such folks as Janice Etter from Montgomery's Inn; Basketeers, by

Cheryl Stoneburgh; choral music—Harry Learoyd, the former principal has been contributing for many years; Tzu Chi Foundation Buddhist Compassion Relief, who come in and work in our long-term-care home; the Village of Humber Heights, which has the opportunity to work with young people; the Canadian Diabetes Ukrainian chapter; Canes; St. James Food Basket; Dorothy Ley Hospice—22,000 volunteer hours; Kiwanis Club Humber Valley, who are having their meeting this week, and it will be 35 years that they have had Meals on Wheels; the Rotary entrepreneur club for students; and Volunteers Etobicoke.

To the parents, the faith community, the churches and just the regular folks in the community who make an enormous contribution each and every day, often without the kind of thanks they so generously deserve for their work, I'd like to say thank you: Thank you on behalf of all the people in Etobicoke, thank you on behalf of myself and thank you for contributing to making a great deal of difference in the lives of so many people in our wonderful community of Etobicoke.

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise today to welcome the Ontario Association of Optometrists, OAO. They are hosting an advocacy day here at Queen's Park.

Since 1909, the OAO has been assisting optometrists across the province, providing the highest standard of eye care and vision care. They have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the importance of regular eye exams and good eye health through their focus on advocacy, community and education.

I want to also applaud the OAO for their focus on, and support for, children's vision through the Eye See ... Eye Learn program. The program recognizes the important link between eye health and learning. If children can't see the board or read the book in front of them, they will face great difficulties in learning. The program helps parents get their children proper eye exams before entering grade 1, and access to glasses if needed.

I want to issue a warm welcome to Dr. Sheldon Salaba, president of OAO, and to a former colleague of ours, a member of the Legislature and past Minister of Health, the Honourable Cam Jackson, who now serves as CEO of OAO.

Shortly, I will be introducing a private member's bill in support of optometrists across Ontario. If passed, my bill would give optometrist corporations the same opportunities that are available to other health professional corporations. It will allow family members to partner in small business to allow them non-voting shares.

I welcome the OAO to the Legislature today and hope my colleagues will join me in supporting eye care professionals across Ontario.

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, as I stated in my question to the Premier this morning, his government's sudden

closure of Ontario Place attractions and the withdrawal of funding at a time when attendance and revenues are up has left many leery of what is really planned for this site. Our efforts to provide input directly to the Premier's appointed advisory panel have been stonewalled by the minister. The minister's response to my question this morning showed a complete unwillingness to understand that Ontarians demand transparency and open access to those advising this government.

Ontario Place has been the jewel in Ontario's tourism crown for years. It has been owned by the people of Ontario, and started out as an affordable day's fun for all the family. Many of us remember picnicking with our families and friends on the grassy hills around the Forum, listening to Canadian musicians. Others spent hours with their children on many rides and water activities, all for the price of admission.

Now, if the rumours are true, Speaker, our much-loved Ontario Place, our family attraction, will lose its family centre and attract only those who wish to gamble. I implore the Premier: Open up the input process so that all Ontarians can have an unvetted say in the future of Ontario Place. This is a very important issue to the people of Ontario.

FANNIE DESFORGES

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

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Speaker, and my honourable colleagues as well. I rise today very proud to congratulate Fannie Desforges, who lives in Fournier, Ontario, in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

A couple of weekends ago in March, Fearless Fannie, a nickname she has earned, skated her way to victory at the 2012 Red Bull Crashed Ice World Championship in Quebec City. She outskated last year's winner, who is from Finland, and a fellow Canadian.

Crashed Ice is an extreme winter race sport that involves skating downhill in an urban environment, in this case the beautiful city of Quebec, la ville de Québec, on a track that includes steep turns and high vertical drops. This sport requires not only great physical demands, but athletes must think fast and stay focused.

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On the night of her victory, Fannie burst out of the gate, giving herself the all-important lead position, and skated to victory untouched in front of over 100,000 cheering fans.

I would like to again congratulate world champion Fannie Desforges on her victory in Quebec. Félicitations, Fannie.

KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2012

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm here to tell you about another big win. Thousands, if not millions, of people were glued

to Hockey Night in Canada on the CBC on Saturday night—not an unusual stat at this time of year—but in my riding of Prince Edward–Hastings, specifically in my home community of Stirling, the anticipation was extremely high.

They weren't tuned in to see if the Leafs were going to make the playoffs—that's already been determined—or another Montreal Canadiens shootout loss. It was about a year ago actually that Stirling resident Cindy Brandt put together a committee with a common goal of making Stirling-Rawdon Hockeyville 2012.

On Saturday, at 10:48 p.m., all the hard work and nearly four million votes had paid off as the little village with the big heart was officially named Hockeyville.

Applause.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much. There's nothing big about Stirling, except for its heart actually. The little municipality of just under 5,000 has a welcome sign out front, boasting some pretty tough NHL players, like Matt Cooke who played for the 2009 Pittsburgh Penguins and still does to this day, Rob Ray, a long-serving tough guy with the Buffalo Sabres, and a number of others.

It's also home to Ontario's smallest police service, a dear little Stirling Festival Theatre and a great agricultural museum there for Hastings county as well.

We lost a local legend in the past year. He was the long-time arena manager—over 30 years—and for 40 years a minor hockey volunteer in Stirling. Barry Wilson left us. I know he was looking down on Saturday night and very proud of what happened in Stirling.

I know the community arena is a gathering place for residents in all of our communities, and it certainly will be in Stirling on October 3 as the Toronto Maple Leafs take on the Columbus Blue Jackets.

So, congratulations to everybody in Stirling on being named Hockeyville 2012.

LEADING WOMEN, BUILDING COMMUNITIES AWARDS

Ms. Soo Wong: Today, I would like to recognize Karen Peach and May Ye Lee, two very special women who were awarded Leading Women, Building Community awards this past Thursday for their work in the riding of Scarborough–Agincourt.

Karen Peach has served as the principal at David Lewis Public School for 11 years. She has been instrumental in building her school into one of the finest educational environments in the province of Ontario. In 2011, the school received the Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement award for the effective use of EQAO data to enhance student learning.

Karen works towards building confidence and a positive mindset among her student body. She's a mentor to her staff and provides essential leadership and support to her female staff and students.

May Ye Lee is a prominent and respected lawyer in the Scarborough community who's continuously reaching out to those who are most vulnerable, including new immigrants and elderly members of the Chinese community. She's a former member of the Scarborough Hospital Foundation and Scarborough hospital.

As a lifelong advocate of organ and tissue donation, May currently sits on the board of the Trillium Gift of Life Network. She also founded the Chinese Outreach Committee to encourage Scarborough's Chinese community to become more engaged in local health issues.

Prosperous communities are built around those who are dedicated to improving the world around them. I'm proud to have these two wonderful women working to continue to build and make Scarborough–Agincourt a great place to live.

OPEONGO HERITAGE CUP

Mr. John Yakabuski: What a great weekend of hockey at the Paul J. Yakabuski Community Centre in Barry's Bay for the seventh annual Opeongo Heritage Cup.

The Opeongo Heritage Cup is a multicultural tournament contested each year by players with roots in the Bonnechere and Madawaska valleys who have Polish/Kashubian, Irish, German/Wendish or Algonquin First Nation ancestral ties.

This year, the fans were treated to perhaps the most tightly contested tournament ever. Each and every game was competitive to the end as the players gave their all, vying for the championship, symbolic of cultural hockey supremacy in the valley.

The quality of hockey in this tournament is top-notch. The rosters included ex-NHLer Rod Schutt playing for the German team, as well as a number of players with OHL experience, among them, Sudbury Wolves player Sam Schutt, who is also Rod's nephew.

The MVP of the tournament was Will Hourigan, who happens to be the nephew of Haldimand–Norfolk MPP Toby Barrett.

On a sad note, the honorary captain of the Irish Shamrocks, Phil Conway, a tremendous community-minded person with a long history in the valley and a current member of the municipal council, passed away on Tuesday, March 27. Phil was always an integral part of this tournament, and he will be missed greatly, not only at the Heritage Cup, but everywhere in the valley.

In Sunday's thrilling final pitting the German Black Eagles against the Irish Shamrocks, I have no doubt that Phil was providing somewhat of an assist to his compatriots. In a game that went down to the wire, the Shamrocks reclaimed the crown that had been held by the Algonquin Thunderbirds for the past three years.

Congratulations to all, and a big thank you to David Shulist and all the volunteers who gave so much of their time to make the event another smashing success.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT (OPTOMETRY PROFESSIONAL CORPORATIONS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES (SOCIÉTÉS PROFESSIONNELLES D'OPTOMÉTRIE)

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 59, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 59, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

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. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am appreciative that the Ontario Association of Optometrists are here today. They brought this to my attention because it's simply a matter of fairness and equity.

The preamble is, "The bill amends the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, with respect to a corporation's eligibility to hold a certificate of authorization issued by the College of Optometrists of Ontario. Currently, a regulation under the act sets out conditions that a corporation must satisfy to be eligible for a certificate of authorization. All those conditions require that all the corporation's shares must be owned by one or more members of the college. The new section 35.1 of the act"—I'm finding it difficult—"provides that a corporation's non-voting shares may be owned by a family member of a member of the college who owns voting shares in the corporation or the trust for the minor children of a member of the college who owns voting shares of the corporation."

This is a matter of fairness, and I suspect that it will be supported by the Legislature.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I rise to recognize World Autism Awareness Day. Every year, on April 2, we join together to promote a greater understanding of autism and to celebrate the accomplishments of the remarkable people living with autism.

I want to start by paying tribute to all those who work on a daily basis to make a difference in the lives of people with autism: the front-line workers, the advocates, parents, family members and researchers who all help people with autism reach their potential. I want to

especially pay tribute to the children, youth and adults living with autism for overcoming extraordinary challenges and for their remarkable contributions that they make to our province and to our communities.

In Ontario, they have exceptional advocates like Marg Spoelstra, executive director of Autism Ontario, who was recently named a member of the Order of Canada in recognition of not only a lifetime of dedication to the community, but for her advocacy on behalf of people with autism and their families.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is quickly becoming a world leader in the area of autism research. One example is the Province of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Disorders Network project. This project will study neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, and it's causing great excitement in the scientific world. The research team is creating the first-ever Canadian clinical trials to better understand the causes and the symptoms of autism and to speed up access to new treatments.

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Mr. Speaker, on this World Autism Awareness Day, know that our government is committed to making a difference for people with autism and for their families. In the last eight years, our government has more than quadrupled autism investments. We have broadened the range of supports and services available to children, youth and adults with autism and for their families. We have made substantial investments in intensive behavioural intervention, or IBI, a treatment that benefits children at the severe end of the autism spectrum.

Since 2010, transition teams have been on the ground in all school boards across Ontario so that children and youth can transition smoothly into the school environment and have every opportunity to succeed. Parents and caregivers are receiving much-needed respite services, including March break and summer camp programs.

Mr. Speaker, we are on track to have 8,000 young people a year with autism spectrum disorder benefit from new applied behaviour analysis, or ABA, based services, services that help them develop communication, social and daily living skills, and manage better in school. These are important programs, programs that will make a real difference in the lives of families, but I know that we have more work to do.

I had the privilege of visiting Surrey Place last week, the lead agency here in Toronto for our government's autism intervention program. There, I saw the rollout of our ABA services in action. I saw the dedication of talented therapists and clinicians. I saw the immense amount of love, Mr. Speaker, that parents have for their beautiful children, the pride they have in them and the commitment they have to helping them succeed and reach their full potential.

Seeing the program in action really inspired me and it made me proud of the difference that our programs are making in the lives of families across this great province. It made me proud of these kids for all that they've been able to accomplish: for confronting challenges and overcoming them, for the contributions that people with

autism make to our communities and to our province; and it made me proud of the parents who work so hard, every hour of every day, to help their kids reach their full potential, who stand up for their kids and advocate on their behalf, who do what's right and what's best to secure their kids' future, providing them with hope and opportunity.

So, Mr. Speaker, on World Autism Awareness Day, let us all join with others across the globe and right here in Ontario as we recommit ourselves to that important goal: helping individuals with autism reach their full potential, with dignity and respect for them and for their families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses? The member for Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is an honour to rise and speak on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day. I'd like to thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and I echo your heartfelt remarks.

This day is a relatively new phenomenon. In 2012, we mark just the fifth anniversary of this occasion. We are, of course, accustomed to newness. More than a decade into the 21st century, it's not usual for us as people to feel a sense of accomplishment. We live in a time of sparkling scientific advances and astounding technologies, but for all of that, there is much that we still do not know. We don't know what causes autism. We can't say we might cure it.

But we do know that earlier childhood intervention can make a tremendous difference in an individual's quality of life. We know that research continues to reveal insights into this condition, and we know that popular ignorance of autism spectrum disorders is often more limiting than the condition could ever be.

Autism spectrum disorders are a set of conditions with common symptoms. These symptoms include difficulties with verbal and non-verbal communications, social interaction and engaging in conversations or collaborative activities. Individuals with ASD may exhibit symptoms in different combinations and in ways that range from minor to complex. We should see none of them as an impossible challenge. With humility and compassion, we can view the world through the eyes of others, and when we do, we see that autism alone does not deny someone a full and fruitful life. It is the society that fails to knock down barriers to opportunity that shackles individuals with ASD.

World Autism Awareness Day challenges us to confront the stigma and stereotypes around autism. It also asks us to denounce discrimination and appreciate autism spectrum individuals for their great hope and courage, unique gifts and potential. Finally, it asks that we mobilize efforts to make things better. Part of this engagement and public awareness must unfortunately be the realization that we have quite a distance to go, and that those with autism spectrum disorders are still among the most vulnerable and ill served of all Ontarians.

The system needs to do a better job of supporting parents and families as well as improving options and

opportunities for individuals with autism. We all have a role to play.

The first World Autism Awareness Day was celebrated in 2008, a year that was the 60th anniversary of the United Nations declaration of human rights. Since then, the chorus of support for the cause and the children and youth living with autism has given rise to hope of a better world, one where all have a contribution to make and all of us are uniquely gifted. It is a message that the United Nations has promoted throughout its history and one that speaks to all people, all classes, races and ethnic groups.

This message has been given wings by many groups, and I'd like to spotlight one. Autism Ontario, established nearly 40 years ago, is a wonderful organization that has long championed the importance of acceptance and inclusion of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. In doing so, the group has pressed for ever greater opportunities for those individuals, in the conviction that empowerment can transform lives and the bedrock belief that everyone should have the support to build a life as a respected member of society.

There are many reasons for adopting that point of view. The number of Ontarians with autism spectrum conditions continues to rise, across all groups in society. If the status quo is unchanged, autism trends will obviously express themselves in growing costs.

Impacts to health care, social services and the education system are substantial and will only grow over time. But World Autism Awareness Day is not about bottom line costs. It's about the costs that we cannot calculate. It's about the value that extends beyond all reckoning, when we work together to create a more inclusive and supportive world. Let us continue to do so with courageous hearts and open minds.

Miss Monique Taylor: I am very pleased to rise in the House today to recognize World Autism Awareness Day.

First, I would like to thank Tina Fougere, a dedicated autism activist in the Hamilton area. Tina is also the president of the Canadian National Autism Foundation, and it was she who provided me with the jigsaw ribbons distributed to all members earlier today.

I would like to recognize the work of Autism Ontario and their dedication to their stated mission: to ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

On a personal level, I would also like to thank President Leah Miltchin and Executive Director Marg Spoelstra for taking the time to meet with me as the new NDP critic for children and youth services.

Today is World Autism Awareness Day, but I would like to take a moment to recognize all of those for whom every day is autism awareness day. There are so many who devote themselves to raising public awareness, many of them parents of children with autism, and they do so at the same time as living with the never-ending demands and challenges that this disorder has inflicted on their families.

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We all love our children. For some of us, that means throwing a ball around in the park or enjoying family dinners together. For others, it means showing tough love, taking on our children when we see them going astray and needing a more determined approach from us.

But for some, the love of their children means countless sleepless nights. It means constantly, carefully guiding their children through social situations, situations considered normal by most of us but, for their child, a terrifying new experience each and every time. Love of their children means having to fight endlessly for the rights of their child to live the most productive life possible. It means fighting for the services their children so badly need.

Just three years ago, it was said that autism existed in one in about 160 births. Autism Ontario now reports that figure to be 110 births. Recently, reports out of the US put the figure at one in 88. The numbers just continue to rise. We know that early screening is the most important aspect of treatment. We need to be aware of that when we see the waiting list for treatment and reflect on the opportunities that are being missed by delayed treatment.

Autism is a lifelong condition that can be helped enormously with early intervention. As those children move into the school system and on into adulthood, we need to make sure that they have a seamless, integrated system all through their lives. That means making sure that various ministries involved are working closely together in concert so that government can meet the needs of those with ASD.

I would also like to take some time to address the autism intervention program. There can be no doubt that it works wonders in a number of cases, but we must also be aware that each autism case is different. It is a complex disorder, and the necessary treatment will vary from child to child. We need to regularly evaluate the AIP to make sure it is meeting its stated goals and objectives. We know there are many skilled and dedicated professionals working within the AIP, but we need to also know that we can learn from the experiences of each other. We need to keep in place the programs that are working and change those that are not, and we need to recognize the importance of involving families in those decisions.

Just yesterday, there was a rally to protest the closure of Thistletown Regional Centre, a centre that serves individuals with some of the most complex issues at the severe end of ASD. Deep concerns have been raised about the impact of this closure on those who rely on Thistletown's services. They worry about the changing programs that have been working for many years, and they worry that established relationships—years in the making, vital to the treatment—will just disappear. They worry that they were not consulted before the decision was announced.

We need to work together, all of us in this Legislature, along with the program providers and especially those with autism and their families, not just to raise awareness

but also to make sure we are providing the best possible service.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

“Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

“Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

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

“That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets at Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately.”

I wholeheartedly agree, attach my signature and give it to page Seph.

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.”

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with Victoria to the clerks' desk.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I, too, rise to present a petition on behalf of the horse racing industry that reads:

“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 wholeheartedly agree with this petition. I will sign it and deliver it to you through page Hassan.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that’s addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows.

“Whereas a progressive Ontario budget calls for bold and decisive deficit reduction action to ensure that Ontario remains the most attractive and competitive place in North America to set up or relocate a business, raise a family or build a career; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced a budget that sets out a five-year deficit reduction, leading to a balanced budget by fiscal year 2017-18, while preserving Ontario’s progress in infrastructure, health care and education; and

“Whereas the 2012-13 Ontario budget proposes \$4 of expense reduction for every dollar raised in new revenues, with such expense reduction including implementation of key recommendations in the Drummond report, eliminating overlap and duplication, and compensation restraint in the Ontario broader public sector;

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

“That the elected members of all parties support the comprehensive set of financial measures and expense reductions proposed in the 2012-13 Ontario budget to enable Ontario to balance its budget on schedule; enhance its world-leading position; and attract, build and retain the people, careers and companies to build a strong Ontario for generations to come.”

I’m pleased to sign and to support this petition, and to ask page Emma to carry it for me.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s my distinct pleasure—but it’s with a great deal of sadness that I read this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“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” of Dalton McGuinty;

“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” in Ontario;

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

“Call on” Premier McGuinty’s “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’m pleased to sign it and support it on behalf of my constituents, and present it to Alexander, one of the pages.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: I have another 1,300-odd petitions here. They’re coming in by the thousands.

“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, I'll affix my name to it and Asha will bring it down.

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EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: This is a petition to the Legislature of Ontario from parents in Ottawa–Orléans, for the Avalon Public School.

"Whereas the current enrolment of Avalon Public School is 687 students;

"Whereas the student capacity of the school is 495 students, as determined by the Ministry of Education's own occupancy formula;

"Whereas the issue of overcrowding and lack of space makes it impossible for Avalon Public School to offer full-day kindergarten until the overcrowding issue is addressed;

"Whereas Avalon Public School is located in a high-growth community;

"Whereas the enrolment at Avalon Public School is expected to continue rising at a rate of 10% to 15% a year for the foreseeable future;

"Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has made building a new school in Avalon a top capital priority;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and Ministry of Education to provide the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board with the necessary funding to build an additional school in Avalon, to open no later than September 2014."

I agree with this petition and send it forward with Domenique.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition addressed 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 proudly sign my name to this petition.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Walden, which includes Naughton, Whitefish and Lively.

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made 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"—many of their members are here today, Mr. Speaker;

"We, the undersigned, 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, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Emily to bring it to the Clerk.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

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

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of more than a dozen private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients airlifted actually declined by 6%;

"Whereas Ornge was paid \$7,700 per patient transported by land ambulance despite subcontracting this service for \$1,700 per patient, a full \$6,000 per patient less;

"Whereas, after receiving questions of serious concerns at Ornge from the opposition in 2010 and early

2011, the Minister of Health did not provide adequate oversight, ignored the red flags and reassured the Legislature that all was well; and

“Whereas, on March 21, 2012, the Legislature voted to create a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge;...

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

“The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge.”

I support—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further petitions. The member from Huron–Bruce.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With that said, I find it a pleasure to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, from the people of Ontario with respect to the decision to close Blyth Public School by the Avon Maitland District School Board.

“Whereas the pupil accommodation review states that an ARC committee is required, among other things, to determine the value of a school to the local economy, yet in the case of the Blyth Public School, there is in the minutes of the ARC committee not a single reference to any discussion of the effects of school closure on the local economy; and

“Whereas the same guideline states that the ARC, which is appointed by the board, must include membership drawn from the school community and the broader community, including, among others, business and municipal leaders, yet the ARC meetings considering the Blyth Public School included no Blyth business or municipal leaders; and

“Whereas the only invitations to public meetings in Blyth regarding the accommodation review were taken home by students to their parents, with the result that the broader community were not represented in the discussions; and

“Whereas many other communities across Ontario are now encountering very similar behaviours by their school boards; and

“Whereas single-school communities across Ontario are being permanently damaged economically and socially by the closure of their only school, which is, according to Premier McGuinty, the heart and soul of these communities; and

“Whereas the current Education Act of Ontario very undemocratically provides school boards with the absolute power to close any school they choose, with no avenue of appeal available to anyone, not even members of their own communities;

“Therefore, we, the residents of Ontario who have signed our names below, do hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to adopt and enact the following measures:

“(1) An immediate moratorium on all disputed school closures resulting from the accommodation review process and continuing until June 30, 2015; and

“(2) The immediate striking of a truly independent third party body with the authority to review and reverse all disputed school closures found to be detrimental to the community or in conflict with other provincial programs or regulations; and

“(3) Revision of the Education Act to require school boards to work with their municipalities and communities to ensure school closures comply with the principles and practices of sound community and educational planning.”

I do agree with this petition, and I’m pleased to affix my signature.

SENIORS’ HEALTH SERVICES

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

“Whereas the Residential Tenancies Act protects tenants in dwellings, long-term-care homes and retirement homes from sudden and unfair increases to their rent; and

“Whereas additional costs such as the provision of meals and other services are not subject to the said act; and

“Whereas there have been episodes of repeated, large and unjustified increases to the stated costs of meal provisioning in Cornwall and area; and

“Whereas residents do not have a say in the procurement and administration of meals and other services provided by the facility, nor can they opt out of such services when notified of an increase in charges, being thus committed to a “take it or leave it” choice;

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

(1) To instruct the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to enact regulations ensuring fairness, protection and choice for residents of retirement homes and long-term-care facilities that provide any other necessary services such as, but not limited to, meals and personal assistance at an extra cost to their residents;

(2) To instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to undertake a comprehensive review of the administration of retirement homes and long-term-care facilities with respect to the provision of services other than lodging that involve an extra charge to residents.”

I support the petition. I will be signing it and giving it to page Victoria.

1350

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Davenport on a point of order.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I’d like to take this opportunity to welcome grade 10 students from Bloor Collegiate in the great riding of Davenport. Welcome to the Legislature. Thanks for coming.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As the member knows, that's not a point of order, but we absolutely welcome all visitors to the House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2012 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 28, 2012, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks very much, Speaker. Throughout our province's history, Ontario has succeeded when everyone had a stake in prosperity. I often talk about my own father, who arrived in this country without very much. Just by walking into a plant at that time, he was able to land a job that he held for the rest of his life, the kind of job that could raise a whole family on a single salary, a job that meant someone like me, the daughter of an auto worker, could pay for a university education by waiting on tables, which is what I did.

I think everyone here understands that change is definitely a fact of life, and we have to choose how we're going to embrace that change. How do we face the challenges of today? Do we choose a path that leaves people falling further and further behind, or do we focus on the people who make our province work?

Speaker, I've been very clear. When Ontario families are doing well, Ontario will do well, and we need a plan that focuses our efforts on their well-being: making life affordable, creating and protecting good jobs, and ensuring that health care and other services are there for them when they need them.

I was elected—I think we were all elected, frankly—with a mandate to work together to get results for people, to help them through the tough times we're dealing with. That's what voters wanted when they elected a minority government in October.

Now, families are confronted with a budget that leaves them falling further behind, and I, along with this amazing team of New Democrats that I have the very large honour to sit with, have to make a decision. For us, the first step was really quite easy. We decided to talk to people to see what they thought.

That was something that was missing throughout the lead-up to the budget. For the first time in decades, this Legislature didn't have pre-budget hearings. Instead, people were effectively told to submit their views to Don Drummond, a former bank executive who helped write previous Liberal budgets and Liberal platforms.

Now, it's no surprise that people very much feel they have not been heard. That's a message that has come through loud and clear as we've been talking to people. We asked the people of Ontario to tell us what they thought, and they responded. Over 5,000 people con-

tacted us through email. Over 5,000 more have called on our telephone line.

It's no surprise that their views vary quite widely. A lot of people don't want an election, but many, many people think it's worth having one over this budget. Some people are worried about the lack of a plan on jobs. In fact, many people are worried about the lack of a plan on jobs. Some are worried about the impact of cuts on health care. Some feel that they're being asked to take another hit to the family budget while those who can most afford to pay keep getting the breaks. But two things—two things—are very, very consistent: No one thinks this budget is perfect, and they are very, very thankful to be heard.

Now, a lot of what we're hearing is familiar, because it's exactly what we heard before the budget. Ontario's deficit is a significant challenge, but it's one that will not be solved by dramatic cuts that transfer the burden onto household budgets that are already feeling the strain. Ontario's households, Speaker, are dealing with unprecedented levels of debt.

Wages are falling. Unemployment remains stubbornly high. You know, economists tell us that the crisis in Ontario's economy isn't in the corporate sector. Thanks to years of corporate tax reductions, Ontario's corporations have unprecedented levels of cash in reserve. It's households that are falling behind.

Now, unfortunately, the government has pursued a policy of increasing the burden on households to provide more no-strings-attached corporate tax giveaways. I think it's pretty obvious to everyone, this simply is not working.

Although the Ontario economy has followed other jurisdictions in North America in adding employment since the recession, the recovery has been very, very slow and Ontario continues to fall behind. Our unemployment rate is above the national average. The average paycheque in this province is actually shrinking, and we're the only province in Canada where this is happening. It's no surprise then, Speaker, that Ontarians remain concerned about job security and about their financial future.

A recent poll showed that Ontarians are now among the least optimistic about the Canadian economy, with only about one third believing that the economy is going to improve over the next year. The same survey shows that people in this province are also most concerned about job loss, with more than one quarter worried that someone in their household is going to lose a job.

But you don't need to look at polling to know that, Speaker. Anybody who's been to Windsor, anybody who's been to Hamilton, anybody who's been to community after community across the north already knows that things are very, very tough, that people are having a very tough time. We're hearing from people who tell us the same stories, and I'm going to quote from some of those people. One person said, "It's already an everyday struggle now with this budget ... will I eat ... will I have a doctor ... will I be able to afford my bills?" Another person wrote, "Northern jobs are always hit hard. When

mills or mining closes nobody worries” anymore “because there is nothing left.” Another one says this budget “is going to drive already struggling families deeper into poverty and affect others in their standard of living.”

If Ontario is going to succeed, the people who make it work cannot continue to be falling behind. As economist Toby Sanger told the Standing Committee on Finance last year—of course, he couldn’t have told them this year because there were no hearings by the committee this year. But last year, Toby Sanger noted, and I’m going to quote, “There’s a lot of focus on public deficits, but it’s also important to look at the deficits of the household sector and the balances of the corporate sector.... As we all know now, the debt of Canadian households has steadily increased and is now at a record rate of personal disposable income. By some measures, these are higher than rates in the United States.”

He goes on to say, “Meanwhile, corporate debt ratios have kept on falling, even right through the recession. So once again, the corporate sector has great balance sheets and often lots of excess cash, but they aren’t investing in the economy.”

Now, these concerns have also been raised by other economists. Dan Ciuriak and John M. Curtis state this, and I’m quoting: “Households are carrying high debt burdens ... due to high unemployment. The prescription is to cut transfers.... In other words, the prescription for inadequate demand is to cut support for household incomes, thereby reducing demand further.” It makes no sense at all.

Unfortunately, with sales tax harmonization, rising prices for electricity and an agenda of cutbacks, that’s exactly what we’ve been doing, and it’s exactly the wrong thing to do.

What we need, Speaker, is a real plan, a real plan to create jobs and to protect jobs, and we need to have a consistent message. A message that we’ve been hearing from the people of the province is that this current plan hasn’t been working. We’ve been telling them we think the focus needs to be on jobs. They’ve been telling us they agree. The government keeps failing miserably on that front, and this budget plan falls short on the job creation side. There’s just no other way to describe it.

1400

There’s a proposed jobs and prosperity fund that’s talked about in the budget. It sounds good. I’m quite concerned, though, that the only jobs that are going to be created by the jobs and prosperity fund are the advertising jobs for the firm that’s going to be promoting the fund. We’ve seen too much of that kind of thing in this province already.

If we continue to hand out money with no strings attached, without clear criteria that link the cash received to creating and protecting jobs, then we can’t be surprised, Speaker, if we get exactly the same results that we’ve already been getting from this government.

So what do we do? Well, we’ve put forward some pretty simple measures. A first step would be to actually reward those people, those companies that are creating

the jobs. Targeted refundable tax credits, that reward companies when they hire new workers, train them or make job-creating investments in Ontario—that’s when we should be rewarding people.

That’s the kind of thing we need to do in Ontario. If we do that, if we reward those investments for job creation, if we reward those investments for training, if we reward those investments in plants, in machinery, in equipment, in technology, that will ensure that the public dollars that we’re investing are actually creating good jobs for the people of this province. It’s not rocket science. It’s something that occurs in other jurisdictions and actually works quite well.

Ontario also needs to spend some time creating value-added jobs in our resource sector. This is an utter failure that’s been happening for far too many years in the province of Ontario, and we’ve put forward some solutions to that. We can do that. We can actually create value-added jobs from our resource sector with amendments to the Mining Act, to ensure that Ontario’s natural resources are not exported if they can be processed here in Ontario.

We also need to make sure the community has more control over the forest tenure process. That way, the stuff we pull out of the ground, the trees that we chop down in a sustainable way in our north actually put northerners and others back to work, instead of doing what I’ve done all too many times in visiting some of my friends from the north, whether it’s Timmins–James Bay, whether it’s Timiskaming–Cochrane, whether it’s Algoma–Manitoulin—watching tractor-trailer after tractor-trailer after tractor-trailer full of minerals, ore, raw logs being shipped across borders or shipped somewhere else for processing to be done, meaning the jobs that go with that processing are going somewhere else than in Ontario. That’s just not right. It shouldn’t be happening here in Ontario.

What do we see? When we hear about plans to ship raw chromite out of the province or see communities like Dubreuilville decimated by job losses, we know that things have to change, and we know that they can change.

Continued investment in infrastructure is essential to get maximum bang for our buck in terms of creating jobs and stimulating the economy, and the government is taking a huge risk by slowing infrastructure spending while we’re still trying to climb out of a recession.

It’s just a mistake—I don’t know how else to say it. It’s a mistake, plain and simple. I raised it in question period this morning. I’m raising it again this afternoon. It is a plain and simple mistake to privatize Ontario Northland.

Every single dollar spent on infrastructure increases real gross domestic product by as much as \$1.20 in an economy performing below potential.

I’ve outlined a couple of simple steps. It’s not rocket science. It’s simple steps that we can be taking to get people working, steps the government could have taken in this budget, steps the government didn’t take in this budget. The government completely missed the mark in

this budget. The mark is jobs, and that's not a mark we're creating. That's a mark you can see in the unemployment numbers. It's a mark you can see in community after community that's devastated. It's a mark you can see in the unemployment rates of our youth, Speaker. It's a mark you can see in the underemployment levels of so many people who lost decent jobs through the recession and haven't been able to get them back. That's the mark this government missed. It's a huge mark, and I don't know how they could have missed it. But New Democrats have some ideas for them as to how we can get back on track and actually hit that mark.

Speaker, we also need to make life more affordable for people. We need to help household budgets. We need to help those budgets in the process of dealing with our budget as a province. Life has to become more affordable for everyday folks. People are falling behind. They're falling behind like they have never fallen behind before, and the government's response over the last couple of years has been to simply shift more costs onto them and off the corporate sector. That was the rationale behind the HST: 600,000 jobs were promised; instead, we have 600,000 people looking for work.

People have been writing to us with their concerns about these issues, and I'm going to make a couple of more quotes from some of the responses we got. Somebody wrote, "There is nothing in the budget to help seniors with the cost of home energy. New Brunswick got it right by not charging HST." Someone else said, "Where are the jobs the HST was supposed to create?"

This Legislature has already passed second reading of a bill sponsored by the new MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin, and we all know what that bill does. That bill would exempt home heating from the harmonized sales tax. It will be a simple step that would give people a small break, and it's long overdue.

Even more overdue, Speaker, is a review of our electricity sector altogether. We were pleased to see a promise of a full-scale review of the electricity sector in the budget speech. But a review needs to look at real change in a sector that has become an alphabet soup of agencies and a toxic mix of private power deals.

Again, these words are from letters we received, Speaker: "My electricity costs have been rising faster than any other of my expenses and faster than the inflation rate. I strongly agree with the NDP proposal to amalgamate the four electricity agencies (Hydro One, OPG, OPA and IESO) into one company to remove duplication and create efficiencies in the common elements and thereby reduce electricity costs."

If people who are writing to us realize that the electricity system is a mess—that there are far too many agencies involved, that there's far too much duplication, that that duplication is costing us a fortune—why is it that the government has not been able to notice that? It has been an ongoing problem. We've raised it time and time again in this House. They need to start addressing it, because as they don't address it—as they continue to not address it—people's rates continue to go through the roof and they simply cannot afford their hydro bills anymore.

Speaker, we also need to be able to ensure that we have reliable and affordable public services. We're pleased to hear the government say that they want to protect our health care and education, but it's going to remain to be seen whether this will amount to anything at all, other than platitudes, when they look at their budget. They talk a nice talk when it comes to protecting health care and education, but we'll see, and Ontarians will see, if we get to a point where this actual budget they have put forward is implemented. We don't know whether that's going to happen, but if it does, it remains to be seen whether or not education and health care actually will be protected.

I think it's really clear that change in our health care system is going to require more immediate investment in things like long-term care and home care. I mean, it's obvious. Demographically, it's obvious. It's something this government should have realized probably eight years, nine years ago, when they first came to power in Ontario. An immediate first step we proposed, Speaker, was enhancing home care hours to eliminate the long list of people who are waiting for services—thousands and thousands of people waiting for home care services. We think a good place to start fixing our health care system is with that sector, Speaker.

1410

But it's clear that we need to do better. We've received a lot of comments from people who work on the front lines of our health care system. Michael from Toronto wrote this, Speaker, and I quote: "The hospital sector, where I work, is going to face bigger challenges with an aging population and we have to have the flexibility to pay for increasing demand of complex care over the next 10 to 20 years." John from Battersea says, and I quote, "Private home care company executive salaries have been added to the home care delivery chain, while still maintaining case managers at the community care access centres. Why do we need to pay those home care owners and company executives with health care dollars? We have an aging population and now is time to get this delivery mechanism right." New Democrats agree, Speaker.

One other concern that came through loud and clear in the last couple of days is one that's outlined in a quote that I'm going to read from a letter that was sent in by Vitali in Toronto: "It is a disgrace that we paid millions to hydro execs, hospital CEOs etc. ... when in reality their pay affects little to the service they are able to provide.... It is a complete lie to say that to attract the best you must pay insane amounts; these executives aren't running a true business.... [T]hey are running a public organization, which is supposed to be for public good, not to suck money that can go to hire more nurses and teachers!"

Vitali's pretty frustrated, Speaker. I think most Ontarians are frustrated. We watched yet another sunshine list, notwithstanding the platitudes from the last budget that this government was going to get control over CEO compensation, and we actually watched some CEOs have a half-million-dollar increase in their salaries. That

wasn't their base salary, Speaker; that was the increase that they got over last year's sunshine list exposure to this sunshine list disclosure. It's ridiculous. It's unbelievable. The people of this province are sick and tired of seeing their hard-earned health dollars go to these top executives and this government refusing to rein in the salaries, the perks, the benefits that are far out of whack from what everybody else is able to achieve in this province.

Speaker, that brings me to a final and important point. Everyone agrees—I don't think anybody disagrees—that we need to balance the books, but for far too many Ontarians, the budget itself does not take a balanced approach, and CEOs are just one example. While the government is quick to declare a freeze, it's clear that some people are more frozen than others yet again. Colin from Peterborough says that “overpaid hospital CEOs will remain untouchable.” Frances from the Sarnia region told us, “I worked in hospital administration for 20 years and have observed the waste and the revolving door of executives hired and cut loose with outrageous severance packages only to appear weeks later at another hospital.”

The government's current salary “freeze” has left CEO pay climbing by as much as \$500,000 a year, as I've already said. It is clear that it's not working, and in their budget document yet again they pay lip service to anything that really is a hard cap on CEO salaries. So their current scheme in terms of CEOs isn't working, and neither is the government's plan, or their previous plan, to legislate a wage freeze. You know, they've put this in the budget again, or at least they've put it in the speech. They've put in the speech that they're going to legislate a wage freeze. They talk about how they are going to respectfully negotiate, but then they say, of course, “We're going to respectfully negotiate all the while we have a gun to your head, because if you don't behave at the negotiating table, we're going to legislate the terms of a collective agreement anyway.” So it's really not true that they are negotiating in good faith as per the process that negotiations should be undertaken in this province.

As the Minister of Finance and the Premier have noted, the Supreme Court has been very clear on this issue. Legislated wage freezes don't pass the smell test of our Canadian charter. It's quite plain and simple. And that's not me saying it. The Premier has said it. The finance minister has said it. I guess they forgot about that.

Don Drummond, their own expert, noted that it won't contain costs in the long run. In his report, he sets out very clearly that all that is achieved is catch-up in future contracts. That's an ineffective policy direction—ineffective. Now, Don Drummond and I disagree on a lot of things. On that one, we happen to agree, because we've seen it in the past. It's not something like we're making it up, it's not like we think it's not going to be effective. The evidence is clear. It's ineffective.

Speaker, among the letters that we've received is one from Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU. Smokey is with us in the gallery and I wanted to say hello and thank him for being here.

Smokey wrote this in a letter that he sent to me recently: “In my discussions with other labour leaders, there is profound recognition that now is not the time for hyperbole or provocation.... We are actively promoting a forum wherein business, labour, community and government work together to find immediate, balanced and reasonable solutions to Ontario's economic challenges.”

I couldn't agree with him more, Speaker. We need to look at responsible, practical and fair ways to balance the books and the priorities of families.

You know, during the last election campaign, New Democrats proposed restoring a corporate tax rate to 14%, as it's been taken down from that level over the last couple of years. It now sits at 11.5%. We said to take that rate from 11% and take it back up to 14% and start making temporary input tax credit restrictions permanent. So what does all that mean? What's a temporary input tax credit restriction?

Right now, companies can't write off everything in terms of all of their entertainment and all of their sky-boxes, for example, if you go to the Rogers Centre or SkyDome. Companies aren't able to write those input tax credits off. But this government's plan is that, in a couple of years, they're going to be able to start writing that stuff off. So on top of the HST and on top of reduced corporate taxes, now they're going to get yet another bonus. It's going to cost the treasury billions of dollars in a couple of years when that's implemented.

Why do they need another break, Speaker? Why do they need another break? But the finance minister's plan, the Premier's plan, the Liberal plan is to give them more breaks. It is simply unfair and it's unbalanced. It's clear that we need to look at government revenue as well as government spending.

The government has proposed freezing the corporate tax rate instead of proceeding with cuts. Okay; that's a good step. But people we've heard from believe that we can, and have to, go further. Another quote: “I do not like the budget because it targets the poor and disenfranchised. Children need to be protected; health care needs to be enhanced. Let those who have the ability to pay taxes pay more.”

Another quote: “If the Ontario government is going after the average guy, while executives with premium pay packages to begin with are off scot-free, this is not fair. Austerity should be shared by all.”

Speaker, throughout our province's history, Ontario has succeeded when everyone has a stake in prosperity. When Ontario families are doing well, Ontario itself as a province will do well. This budget needs to keep them in mind. As it's currently written, this budget falls very, very short.

We are going to continue to listen to people, and we are going to put forward some ideas for positive change. And we hope—we very much hope, Speaker—that the government will work with us in the spirit of a minority government, in the spirit of the government that the people of this province chose back in October, to avoid an election and to deliver a budget that works for the people who make our province work.

1420

That's the commitment of New Democrats. That's the work that we've been doing and that we're going to continue to do. I hope that at the end of the day we will end up with a budget that works for the people who make this province work. Otherwise, we all know where we're headed.

Speaker, thank you very much. I move the adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Horwath has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES
AMENDMENT ACT (RENT
INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION
À USAGE D'HABITATION
(TAUX LÉGAL D'AUGMENTATION
DES LOYERS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 28, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline / *Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne le taux légal d'augmentation des loyers.*

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to stand here today as the housing critic for the New Democratic caucus to speak on Bill 19, intended to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, which the government claims is an aim to make rent more affordable and predictable. The government proposes a rent increase cap for private landlords for the very profitable rental housing industry at 1% to 2.5%.

When I say "very profitable," the private rental housing industry is one of the only industries that have consistently proven to make money due to the rising property values. Bill 19 will do almost nothing to address Ontario's crisis in affordable housing or provide Ontario's tenants rights to livable, well-repaired and safe units.

Further, Bill 19 will do nothing to deal with the over 50,000 to 60,000 units that are exempted from rent control provisions. This failed experiment to exempt certain units from rent control was supposed to foster a development climate back in 1991-92 to produce more affordable units, but it just didn't happen. And Bill 19 is not retroactive. It does nothing to protect those tenants who have already undergone this year's rental increase in accordance with the guideline. Tenant advocates call it a timid response to the ever rising cost of rents.

Now, the minister stated in her lead last week that this was a balanced approach, that landlords had already

planned for an increase and that it wouldn't be fair for landlords to have a change this late in the game. But what about the people who are on ODSP and those people who are on Ontario Works, having a monthly income of somewhere between \$500 for people on Ontario Works—\$594, I believe—and, on ODSP, \$800 or \$900 a month? What about the balance for them? They thought they might receive a little increase in their OW or their ODSP rates this year, but unfortunately, as the government has proposed in their budget, it doesn't look like that's going to be likely. It looks that, as part of the government's poverty strategy, they're not keeping that promise either. The working poor thought they might get a little increase in the minimum wage that might help them with their rent this year. Single-parent families thought they might receive a little bit of an increase in their \$200-a-year child tax benefit, but that isn't going to happen either. That promise has now been reduced to \$100. Shouldn't there be some balance and fairness for those people like there are for landlords in this province?

I was trained and worked for many years as a registered nurse, and nursing requires many technical skills. But people who choose nursing do so because they want to help others, because they care about others, because they have empathy for others. That is a central role to a nurse and it's a quality that I've used many times in my roles as the mayor of my city, as a city councillor in Welland, as a regional councillor in the area of Niagara. Whether it was in any of those roles or whether it was in my time as a nurse, I've always used listening and empathy as the benchmark when confronted with any issue.

Ontario's renters are the most vulnerable in our province. In no particular order, they are children, they are seniors living in poverty, they're the working poor, they are those on social assistance and on ODSP, and they're the disabled, the immigrants and the people of colour.

I also wonder if the government has turned their mind to what "affordable" means to the most vulnerable in this province. As I stand before you today, I want to quote—this issue was actually before the last Legislature—probably in April or May of last year. My colleague from Parkdale-High Park presented, during the Bill 140 debate, that Bill 19 clearly lacks empathy and any commitment to address housing as a human right. She talked about the grim statistics around Bill 140 in Ontario regarding affordable housing. At that time, 1.3 million Ontarians were paying more than 30% of their income on rental housing; 120,000 families lived in overcrowded situations; 80,000 Ontarians lived in substandard housing; and at that time, 142,000 were on affordable housing wait-lists, and that list in just one year has grown to 152,000 households on the list and growing.

On average, depending on where you live, whether you're a single male, senior or family, the wait-list can be 10 years or longer for affordable housing. Almost one third of Ontario's population lives in rental housing, and people die waiting to get into affordable housing. I've experienced this in my own family and in my own riding.

The insecurity today is compounding the lack of affordable housing because of rising utility costs. You heard our leader speak about the increasing hydro costs that are putting the squeeze on families today. Gas bills and hydro costs are expected to rise another 50%—the HST on home essentials, with this government refusing to give any type of relief to tenants.

The government could bring forward, after committee, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin’s Bill 4, which passed second reading, a bill that provided some relief of HST on certain home heating costs. This would provide some relief to Ontarians experiencing high rents and low incomes.

The income level of Ontarians is stagnating and declining. I quote Kenn Hale, director of advocacy legal services at the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario: “During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to keep the rent increase guideline ‘in line with what is happening in the real world’ for tenants.” He goes on to say, “In the real world, tenants are losing their jobs, facing demands for wage freezes and rollbacks” or living with a zero increase on social assistance. In the real world, the average rent is over \$1,100 for a two-bedroom apartment, and there’s no limit on what a landlord can charge an incoming tenant.

Some people who live in our communities aren’t aware of that. They think that if the unit is rent-controlled, it’s rent-controlled, but in fact the control is with the tenant. Once the tenant leaves, the rent control is gone. All tenants deserve to be protected, including the 300,000 tenant households that live in units exempt from rent regulation. We hope that the minister amends the bill to provide this protection to the units as opposed to the tenant.

I met with a young man employed by one of the stakeholder groups recently who lives in a unit that is exempt from rent control. He told me his landlord wanted to increase his rent this year by 12%. Fortunately, he had the knowledge and the ability to negotiate with the landlord and he was able to reduce that to 6%, but that is still a \$720-a-year increase on a \$1,000-a-month-rent apartment.

The middle class is shrinking. Half of all tenants spend more than 50% of their income on rent, and there are tenants who are making choices between buying groceries, sending their kids to a sporting event or on a class trip, or paying for medication. Good housing is as basic to individual and population health, as bad housing policy leads to a heavy burden for poor health, premature death and increased policing costs, prison costs, health care costs and social services costs.

1430

Dr. Gary Bloch is a family physician and University of Toronto professor who founded Health Providers Against Poverty. He had an article in the local paper on March 28 where he made the link between poverty to the much-needed social supports for those on low income and the enormous damage to his patients’ health. He’s quoted as saying, “I worry this will result in our society being less

healthy, which should be the number one goal of the government.”

The NDP caucus in the last session of Parliament introduced a number of key bills and motions, including a motion to say that housing was a human right. That motion was rejected by both the government and the official opposition party at the time. Speaker, I ask you: What kind of government fails to recognize adequate and affordable housing as a right? The United Nations recognized housing as a fundamental right. Do we stand with the United Nations or not?

Housing is a human right on an international scale, and the international community has long recognized that it is a fundamental and universal human right that must be protected by law. Since proclaiming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, more than 60 years ago, they have recognized this by producing many documents; for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Canada has ratified all these treaties, and yet we couldn’t get a motion passed in this chamber to recognize housing as a human right.

Speaker, Ontario is one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world, and yet many Ontarians do not have access to adequate and affordable housing. Access to appropriate housing is inequitable, as I said before, for many groups who are identified by prohibited grounds of discrimination including race, disability and family status. International human rights groups have severely criticized Canada’s housing situation numerous times. In 2007, Miloon Kothari, the former United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing, described Canada’s housing situation as very stark, very disturbing and amounting to a national crisis—and things have not improved since then.

In the wake of this week’s budget, the government needs to negotiate with the federal government for a long-term affordable housing strategy with the funding attached, and the province needs to ensure that municipalities have access to a wide range of funding programs and policies to properly maintain the existing housing structure. The government needs to invest adequate funding to build new homes, repair rundown housing and support housing-related programs.

In addition, there are no-cost steps that the government could take to improve affordable housing. The government could amend the Planning Act to allow municipalities, on a voluntary basis, to develop mandatory inclusionary housing plans similar to initiatives in a number of US cities, where a fixed percentage of affordable homes is required in every new development. Each municipality would be responsible for setting its own inclusionary housing rules, but the province needs to give municipalities the legal right to create inclusionary housing plans through an amendment to the Planning Act.

Even Don Drummond, in his report to the Liberal government, suggested that the Planning Act be amended to include inclusionary zoning.

Access to safe and affordable housing is a human right, a basic need and a vital determinant of individual, family and community health, and it is critical to Toronto's ability and this province's ability to attract and sustain workers as a major driver of Ontario's economy. It plays an important role in ensuring a greener, livable city and promoting vibrant communities.

Across Ontario, Speaker, more than 627,000 households are in core need of housing—lack suitable, adequate or affordable housing without income to access it. This crisis is particularly felt in large cities like Toronto, where a large number of the residents in the city are renters. As I said earlier, it is the communities and groups disproportionately affected—who are lone-parent families, racial minorities, people with disabilities.

Beyond planning, municipalities have limited tools for actually building affordable housing. They often lack the federal and provincial funding that is required to make much-needed expansions. Municipalities do their best to provide some housing in their communities. In my community, for example, we've partnered many times with Habitat for Humanity. I know that in the city of Toronto there have been some Habitat for Humanity projects, but this doesn't go anywhere near the numbers of housing units that we actually need.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission knows that low social and economic status is a common factor in many types of housing discrimination. People identified by code grounds are disproportionately likely to have low incomes. The shelter allowance rates for families and people who receive social assistance are far below market levels. This, together with a limited supply, puts people at significant disadvantage when seeking shelter.

The Human Rights Code provides protection against discrimination in housing based on specific grounds, including the receipt of public assistance. The inclusion of receipt of public assistance allows individuals with a low social or economic status to file human rights claims when they have been subjected to differential treatment in housing.

However, many people with low social and economic status will not be in receipt of public assistance—people earning low wages, minimum wage jobs, homeless people living on the streets—but they still experience that differential treatment in housing. In many cases, there is a strong link between the social and economic status and membership in a code-protected group. These people will be identified by one or more code grounds and may experience discrimination—intersection of low social and economic status with other factors.

Speaker, I've had the opportunity over the last few months to actually meet with people in my community and with people here in Toronto. I've also met with some landlord advocacy groups. I've met with individual tenants who have shared many stories with me and even provided me with the addresses of what they call slum

landlords across my riding and in other areas of the province. They talk to me about the disrepair of the units that they live in. I want to share some of those with you today.

In Niagara alone, there are almost 13,000 people who are in receipt of Ontario disability support benefits. This equates to about 18,000 people when you factor in children and spouses. The ODS program is designed to be a long-term program. It isn't something that you're going to be on for three months or six months; it's pretty well expected that if you go on to ODSP and you have some form of permanent disability, you're going to be on it for a long time, if not the rest of your life.

Yesterday, the government introduced a budget that will freeze ODS benefits to current levels. ODS recipients were finally just climbing out of the black hole from the 22% cut in benefits from the Mike Harris regime back in the mid-1990s. I believe that just this year, they have surpassed those 1995 rates. So, 17 or 18 years later, they finally got back to where they were in 1995, only to be hit again with a freeze in those benefits.

Some will say, "They survived 17 or 18 years, so a freeze isn't a bad thing. They should be able to overcome that reduction." Well, I say that those people on ODSP, for all those years, just existed. They continued to need to use food banks on a regular basis. They had to shop at thrift stores and charitable stores.

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They had to eat a meal a day at their local shelter or at their church in my community. They don't even have enough money left at the end of the month to go to a movie. That's a sad, sad scenario for thousands of people living on ODSP in our province.

I have people in my riding who can't even afford to take a bus to a neighbouring community to visit their family, and I've been stopped on the street day after day and told these kinds of stories. These are the same people who are paying more than 50% of their income on rent.

There were more than a million visits to Toronto and area food banks in 2011. Then, after paying more than 50% on their rent, they're living in substandard accommodations. I had the opportunity to send out surveys in my riding and ask questions about the repair of rental units that constituents were forced to live in, and I got an earful from many. They completed the surveys, and the messages were consistent. They even provided me with the addresses of apartments in great disrepair in all five of the municipalities that are in my riding. They did this anonymously, however, because they fear retribution or eviction if they come forward and complain in public, because they've seen this happen to many of their neighbours and friends.

They complained about heat and cold issues, drafty doors and windows, which lead to higher heating and utility bills for them. They talked about mice and droppings in their units, raccoons and squirrels in their attics and walls, fleas and other insects—perhaps bedbugs, which is a huge problem in many areas of this province—that have never been dealt with by their land-

lord between tenants. They told me about leaking roofs and ceilings caving in, the work not being completed, even though the scaffolding was in place and had been erected for more than a year.

Many of them had mould issues in their units, no fire escape, problems with water temperatures or carpeting that had mildew and was never cleaned between tenants. Some did not even have a fire extinguisher or a smoke alarm, emergency or exit lighting, and were very concerned about their own and their family's and their children's medical and physical health and safety in some of these buildings.

Leaky pipes, sewage pipes leaking, low water pressure and clogged drains were regular occurrences on the surveys that I read; broken windows, lack of door locks and undersized electrical panels for the buildings that caused bulbs to burn out on a regular basis and the power to go out regularly. They addressed many other issues of the low aesthetic quality of their homes and yards, and while important in addressing their self-esteem, morale and quality of life issues, these were less significant than the major issues they were concerned about.

In some cases the tenants reported landlords had made physical threats against them if they complained. They talked about evictions. In fact, there are no codified protections to stop landlords' claims that they are moving in family members to units that they are actually evicting from.

Now, some did report that they did complain to their landlord or to the superintendent. They spoke to their landlord-tenant advisory staff. They sought legal counsel. They spoke to community workers and housing advocates, to city hall, to their MPP perhaps, or staff, but in these cases, even then the work did not get done, and so after many months or even years in some cases, they would have to move. They also talked about the length of time it takes to get through the process, the mediation, the tribunal and eventually the court system for enforcement of work orders; this, coupled by the costs of such appeals or charges.

I met a woman who consented to have her name in the public, Marilyn McHaffie from Welland. She provided me with letters to read to you about the life of a woman living in poverty and substandard housing. If I can take a moment, I'm going to read you parts of one of those. Marilyn McHaffie was actually from Guelph. She was well employed. She fell ill and she ended up in my riding for personal reasons. When she first arrived there, she went to a women's shelter. There was a space reserved there for her. Perhaps there wasn't a space for her in Guelph. She had been looking for rental space but she was unable to find a place. With the recent loss of her job, combined with having pets, that was a deterrent for landlords to rent to her. Eventually her sister, surfing the Internet, found her an apartment, and the ad said pets were welcome, so it looked like a good possibility for her. The ad also said that Ontario Works and ODSP recipients were welcome. "I knew that my recent unemployment would not be an issue" then.

"As I looked at the apartment, I realized it was really not suitable but had no choice.... I would try to make it into a nice home, regardless of the obstacles.

The landlord even asked her to put her social insurance number on the application. "I was concerned and said that I did not think" that it was right but he told me I would have to and "I really had no choice. At least I would not be living in a shelter or on the streets and could keep my pets."

She goes on to say, "The windows did not have any insulation" and were drafty. The heating system did not work. There was a little heat in the living room but none in the bedroom and it was too cold to sleep in the bedroom during most of the winter. The windows had no screens and so the bees often entered because there were no screens. Her "washroom and kitchen had leaks under the counter which had left black mould." Although there "were numerous checks done on the plumbing when the landlord received a high water bill," he really wasn't concerned about the plumbing pipes leaking under the sink because that wasn't creating a high water bill for him. So he had the water lines fixed, but he didn't take care of the other leaks.

"By the time I had left this apartment, the wall of the bedroom was covered in black mould. When I moved, I could not bring my bed or couch to my new home due to the mould....

"The shower had not worked since I moved in" and there was often no hot water....

"The fire inspector found numerous issues that needed to be resolved, including having a fireproof ceiling installed over the bar downstairs. Some of the issues were fixed, but there was still the risk of fire as the ceiling was never installed. Each unit was to have an extinguisher but I never had one....

"The knife I had barring my door"—because her locks didn't work—"clattered to the floor from the fight in the hallway" from the bar below. "I did not feel safe in my home."

She goes on to say, "As I looked at the parking tickets, I could not understand why I was being ticketed when I was in the parking space that was included in my rent." After "five tickets had been put on my van.... I asked my landlord why he told me parking was included." He said he forgot to tell her that she had to move her vehicle around. Street parking belongs to the city.

"I knew that there was no use in trying to have repairs done through the tribunal as other tenants had already tried. In their three appearances, the landlord was removed from the hearings each time for inappropriate behaviour and ordered to do repairs that were never done. It was not worth the fight....

"My mind recalls the substandard living conditions, squalor, intimidation and harassment brought about by this" landlord. "I recall the infants and children living in this filth. This building is not fit for habitation yet he continues to rent these apartments, taking advantage of people living in poverty. This was not a cheap apartment. The rent was \$595 for a very small one-bedroom apartment."

She goes on to say, Speaker, “People come and people go, but rarely does anyone stay for long. It is not a place that anyone could really call a home, despite the best efforts to make it such. I would never go back. It would be better to sleep on the streets.

“Marilyn McHaffie.”

Speaker, that is what some—and I expect many—of our tenants are dealing with in rental housing across this province. I’ve also had emails from some of my Toronto colleagues from various apartment units that they live in.

This government in its budget is now proposing that the repair and the work enforcement for these repairs be downloaded to municipalities and that those bylaws in our communities can better address the complaints and enforce the work orders. Well, I can tell you, Speaker, that as the mayor of the city of Welland back 10 years ago and as a city councillor, my municipality, not unlike many of yours, works on a strictly complaint-based system of property standards and clean-yards bylaws, and that the number of staff assigned as enforcement officers is pretty slim, coupled with the fear of tenants’ complaints and work orders that will never get done—they’ll never get ordered, let alone get enforced.

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In addition to that, Speaker, the bill and the current legislation actually allows landlords, year after year, to be able to seek increases above the guidelines if there are some extenuating—extenuating, not kind of extreme situations such as a high tax increase or, I guess, higher than expected utility bills or some major repair problem in their building. But the same balance is not there for the tenant.

Our party actually thinks that landlords should be limited to only very extreme situations to be able to go back and ask for anything above what the highest increase could be.

We also think that there should be a loan fund established for landlords to take the burden off of landlords and tenants when these badly needed repairs need to be done.

Speaker, we need a bold, sustainable, long-term affordable housing strategy that responds to the housing needs and ensures the rights of renters in Ontario. The provincial government may be hesitant to make the full investment that is required to tackle Ontario’s housing crisis head-on, but implementing half measures like this little bill, this very narrow rent control to deal with problems, will not bring about resolutions for struggling communities.

As I said, imagine if you were an Ontario Works recipient getting \$500, \$600 a month and trying to live in Toronto or anywhere in this province. We know what that life looks like. It looks like homelessness, it looks like food banks, and it certainly doesn’t look like anybody who can afford anything in the way of housing.

The NDP in the 39th parliamentary session also introduced a bill on tenants’ rights and landlord licensing. The bill would have applied to landlords with greater than six units, because we understand that small landlords have

their struggles. Landlord licensing just simply says that where the city work orders are held against a building—and I think there was an example given when Bill 140 was introduced, an eight-storey building where there was an elevator out of order for three months and there were seniors living on the eighth floor. Well, that landlord wouldn’t be licensed again if he didn’t comply with those work orders.

Landlord licensing is a simple idea, a self-funded idea that would allow the province to insist on compliance with work orders, something that is not currently happening in Ontario. Of course, it’s not happening in wealthy areas or luxury apartments, but more importantly, this is what’s happening in low-income tenanted areas, of which we have many in this province.

The long-term affordable housing strategy has to have strong, bold targets and sustainable funding. A long-term affordable housing strategy must ensure adequate supply of quality affordable units for Ontarians, supported by multi-year financial commitments.

I can tell you that in my time as the vice-chair of Niagara Regional Housing, that was always the biggest hurdle that we faced. Getting that funding one year at a time, it was so difficult to get any projects off the ground. It was difficult to provide subsidies for people any longer than beyond the year, and so it really provided no stability for tenants in their housing units.

If we wanted to compare ourselves to somebody who has done a great job in affordable housing, it is Sweden, which is a much smaller country than ours. Over a 10-year period, they actually produced 100,000 new units of affordable housing each year. They called it the million-home program, and they don’t have an affordable housing crisis any longer. Many jurisdictions do much better than us, and in fact we have one of the worst records provincially and one of the worst records internationally.

We also need to provide funding so that at least 50% of these units can provide rent-geared-to-income assistance.

An effective housing strategy also requires a solid foundation of accurate information about the scale of housing insecurity and homelessness in Ontario, and a clear way to measure progress. It must track the progress on whether actions taken under the strategy are systematically reducing the number of households on the wait-list, and we know that’s not so because, in one year, the list went from 142,000 to 152,000. So we know the numbers are on the rise, and it’s going up every year. The list is getting longer and tenants continue to pay more than 30%, more than 40% and, in many cases, more than 50% of their income on rental housing.

There was a time in the history of this province in Canada when young couples had a job, they got married—or they didn’t get married—and they had a dream to own their own house like their parents. But here, there is a complete lack of affordability for young couples. I know here in Toronto housing prices are very high, but even in my riding, where housing prices were quite reasonable, new houses are now starting at

\$300,000 and \$400,000—pretty hard to buy on a \$10-an-hour job or an \$11-an-hour job. So the dream of home ownership will not come true for many Ontarians.

The greatest demand for affordable housing is often for those with disability, mental health and addiction issues. They are the hardest and the most expensive to house because they need supportive housing, and because there's virtually no supportive housing, most are at risk. Most of our homeless population at any given time fall into that category. They are homeless for a reason, and they die on our streets.

When I did my member's statement—I think it was my first member's statement here in the House—I actually talked about a supportive housing project in my riding that lost its funding last September. I spoke about one of the residents there. Her name was MaryJane Huneault. She was a tenant with long-standing mental health issues. This non-profit affordable housing building was built on the premise that it would always have supportive housing. After 20 years it lost all of its funding, \$150,000, because somebody—I don't know whether it was the province or whether it was the federal government—required an RFP after all those years and the funding went to some other agency.

Now, this woman actually had not had a hospital admission in 17 years because she was living in supportive housing. Before she actually went into that building, she cycled in and out of the hospital several times a year, but being in that kind of a background, she was able to have support in budgeting her money, paying her bills, and when she was having periods of anxiety, she had a support worker to talk to. So there is certainly more need to have supportive housing projects. We would save a lot of money on prison costs, on health care costs and on policing costs.

The government budget proposes a reduction this year, in 2012, in aboriginal affairs, and they propose to reduce the budget by almost \$3.4 million to communities that are the poorest in our country. I can't understand why they would be wanting to reduce that budget in light of northern members' statements on a regular basis about what's going on in our aboriginal communities.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Attawapiskat.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Attawapiskat. Yes, thank you.

Now the people who had a glimmer of hope that at age 65—so I'm somebody on ODSP and I'm getting \$850 a month or \$900 a month. I'm only 53 years old, and I was thinking, "Well, you know, when I hit 65, at least I'm going to get old age and guaranteed income supplements, and maybe I'm going to have \$1,400 a month; for the first time in my 40 years of adulthood I'm actually going to have a little bit more money that might make my life just a little bit more easy." But that glimmer, too, has been extinguished by the federal government, which now is going to make them wait till they're 67 to actually be able to collect any of that. I wonder what will happen to those people between age 65, when their CPP is ending or their ODSP is ending or whatever it is—what's going to happen to them in that two-year period? Are we going to have more homeless?

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When I was doing some work to prepare for today, I looked back on some of the government bloopers over the last couple of years and some of the things we've been talking about in the last few weeks, in particular, situations like Ornge.

I said, "Imagine if the \$50 million that was thrown at Ornge, in addition to their regular budget, over the last five years had been used for housing." Well, I'm not an accountant, but as I said, I have done some work with Niagara Regional Housing and have an idea of what a unit of affordable housing is expected to cost to build. That \$50 million that we kind of threw at Chris Mazza would have built 400 new units, or it would have provided rent stability subsidy for 40,000 people in Ontario for one year. The \$25 million that's still missing at Ornge that nobody seems to be able to find, even the 30 forensic auditors, actually would have built probably 200 new units or provided one year's subsidy for 20,000 people in need in this province.

Then there was the billion-dollar eHealth waste. Imagine the number of families and people that could have been supported by that billion dollars. That was a big number; I had to figure out how many zeroes there actually are in a billion dollars. But I think it's a thousand million, and I see a nodding head that I may be correct. That actually would have provided 7,000 units of affordable housing or supported 833,333 households for a year with a rent subsidy. I think it would have been a far better use of the money.

Back to the strategy, the long-term housing strategy needs to make housing truly affordable and accessible. The United Nations said it best. Why isn't the reality here? They suggest introducing a monthly universal housing benefit for low-income Ontarians, expanding the priority list for social housing, retrofits and funding for at least 2,000 new supportive housing units. But there is no commitment to new funding at this point.

Another target, of course, is to reform housing legislation to build stronger communities. Perhaps the reason this government hasn't been more forthcoming in building rental units—in fact, not at all: not one new rent-geared-to-income suite, no inclusionary zoning and nothing of concrete status in this new bill—is that they don't have any money. We have to admit that that's partly true. The government doesn't have any money. They're working in a deficit, \$16 billion or so, and a debt of more than all the other provinces combined. They've actually doubled our structural debt in seven years in office.

But here's the reality of the economy of housing: It literally costs more dollars and cents to keep someone underhoused or homeless than it does to provide housing for them. In fact, depending on which report you look at, it can range anywhere from \$55,000 to \$70,000 a year to keep people underhoused, because of the policing costs, the prison costs and the health care costs. The current action plan of this government, which is non-action, is costing more—not just in the long run, where it could be

argued it costs way more, because again, we're talking about poverty generation to generation to generation and the cost of that, but it costs more in the short term.

In the city of Toronto and across this province, we have thousands of homeless on our streets, many of whom die during the winter. Thankfully, this year we've had a very mild winter, and I don't think too many deaths, but there have been winters I remember when every day we were finding a body in the street. Well, governments—this one included—have for a long time turned their backs on the housing file entirely, done very little. This government has talked the talk but not walked the walk. This bill is a gesture with a minimum rent control provision. A bolder move would have been to apply rent controls on units rather than rent controls between landlords and tenants, a small move but keeping that maximum number of units. It helps a little bit here and there; it's a feel-good measure. But there's not one new unit, not one new dollar and not one new rent supplement in this bill.

When you hear what housing activists—those who are in the field, those who do nothing but housing, those who look at housing issues every day of their lives—have to say when asked about the housing crisis, they say we need a strategy but we need the funding to go along with it.

Harvey Cooper, the manager of government relations for the Co-operative Housing Federation, who was here late last week, says, in reaction to the bill last year—I had a bit of a discussion with him about this year's bill—that it fails to recognize that construction of affordable housing actually has a major economic stimulative effect on the economy and can play a key role in recovery, while reducing poverty and providing a valuable public asset for the long term.

He goes on, “We agree with the province that the federal government has a responsibility to continue to support affordable housing.... But in presenting its vision for affordable housing, the Ontario government should look to lead, not follow. Its long-term plan should be grounded in a commitment to funding affordable housing as a core, continuing government program.” It's never going away, folks. We're always going to need affordable housing in this province.

This government has responded to the economic bad times by giving incredible corporate welfare handouts to corporations who are storing the cash while ignoring the plight of hundreds of thousands of Ontario renters. The middle class is shrinking, and we know from past experience that putting people to work, infrastructure investment, new builds and new housing are policies that help. This government is not doing that.

One of the best-known housing experts in Ontario is David Hulchanski, a professor at the University of Toronto who has done a study on poverty by postal code. Here is what he says: “The provincial and municipal governments could implement specific policies to maintain and promote mixed neighbourhoods, inclusionary zoning whereby any medium-to-large residential developments

must include 15% to 20% rental and affordable units. They could also end vacancy decontrol—the right of landlords to charge whatever they wish when a unit becomes vacant—and thereby discourage the displacement of low-income residents. This is happening in many communities throughout the province.

“Bill 19 does not address the critical need for increased investment in new development and the ongoing maintenance of existing properties. However, the potential of any strategy cannot be fully realized until properly funded,” and he goes on to say, “We would encourage the government to continue providing even limited funding in this current economic climate and to adopt some innovative financing solutions that the community-based housing sector proposed.”

Under the eight years of the McGuinty Liberal government, the housing crisis has gotten worse: less housing, more families on the waiting list, longer waiting times, more precarious housing and more renters who cannot afford the basic necessities. That's what has happened here in our great province.

The Liberal government should have taken ownership of what our province looks like. After eight years, and now in a minority situation, what the Liberals have given us are longer lists, no new units and rental units in the profit sector in disrepair because of minimal to no enforcement of property standards.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the federal government needs to take ownership of the crisis as well, and we have long called for a national strategy. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee has long asked for the 1% solution: 1% of the budget to go to housing. We're still asking for that federally, and we still need to get that federally.

There is so much that could happen in our province, but because of the narrow-sighted thinking of this government, they think—and I quote the member for Parkdale–High Park, who has been a real advocate in housing: “It's a kind of thinking that says, ‘It costs money, it doesn't make money, to invest in affordable housing. It costs money, it doesn't make money, to help people rise above the poverty line. It costs money, it doesn't make money, to put infrastructure front and centre and new-build affordable housing front and centre.’ That's the kind of short-sighted, conservative vision, quite frankly, that has caused this problem in the first place. ‘Let's leave housing up to the private sector.’ That has given us the Ontario that we live in now,” and that is essentially the philosophy of the McGuinty government.

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So is it enough to help Ontario's most vulnerable? Absolutely not. And, again, who are Ontario's vulnerable? They are seniors living in poverty, they are children; they are single-parent families, the disabled, those living on social assistance, those underemployed, new Canadians, people of colour, low-income workers.

The Wellesley Institute's Michael Shapcott, in an article on March 20, 2012, says, “The recently released Drummond report on provincial spending urges increased

investment in new affordable homes and urgent attention to aging existing housing and calls on the federal and provincial governments to negotiate a new, long-term housing deal that would provide funding both for much-needed new affordable homes and also for repairs of existing, substandard housing.

“In completing work on Ontario’s ... budget, the provincial financial minister”—this is Mr. Drummond to the provincial finance minister—should take up the “recommendations that the provincial and federal governments negotiate a long-term affordable housing plan with adequate funding; and that the province ensure that municipalities have access to a range of funding programs and policies to properly maintain housing infrastructure.”

He goes on to say “doubling the allocation for affordable housing in the Infrastructure Ontario affordable housing loan fund to \$1 billion, to be financed by the sale of government bonds; ... reversing the cuts in both operating and capital dollars for affordable housing in the past year, and restoring the approximately \$600 million that is required to build new homes, repair run-down housing and support housing-related services.” And “amend the Planning Act to allow municipalities to develop mandatory inclusionary housing plans, similar to initiatives in hundreds of US cities where a fixed percentage of affordable homes is required in every development. Each municipality ... responsible for setting its own inclusionary housing rules, but the province needs to give municipalities the legal right to create inclusionary housing plans through an amendment to the Planning Act.”

So this is out of the Drummond report.

There is absolutely no commitment from this government to a sustainable, funded long-term housing strategy with any funding in this budget. So are we going to support Bill 19? Likely, we will be supporting this, but once again, it is a very small, narrow attempt for a much larger housing crisis in this province. The government has certainly failed to do the best job that they could do to ensure that all Ontarians have better access to affordable housing for Ontario tenants. I think, and I think that my colleagues in the NDP would agree, that it’s shameful that there are so many people in our communities living in poverty.

I’ll just spend the last few minutes talking about the limitations of the bill in general. The advocacy groups that I’ve met with over the last couple of months do not think that the guideline is the biggest program when it comes to affordability. According to the Federation of Metro Tenants’ Association, if the bill had been in place for the last two years, it would have only reduced rents by \$3 a month. So if you were renting an apartment for \$1,000 a month and you had this little bill in place, you would have saved \$3 a month over the last two years.

There are bigger problems that need to be addressed. The vacancy decontrol, I think, is a very big problem, and we really need to focus attention on making sure that it is the units that are rent-controlled and not the tenants that are rent-controlled.

We also need to go back and look at the 50,000 or 60,000 units that were initially exempted from rent control back in the early 1990s. I think that number, in some of the data that I looked at, has actually grown to 300,000 units because of the rent-decontrol piece that needs to be addressed.

Rent regulation should apply to all private rental units, regardless of date of construction, and safeguards need to be in place to make sure that rental units are kept in a proper state of repair. Landlords should not be allowed to increase rents while there are outstanding work orders or needed repairs for units.

Mr. Speaker, even if people go to small claims court, if they go through the tribunal piece and they don’t get their work done or if they go to their municipality where they have a bylaw and they have to go through the court system with the municipality, some of them are waiting 12 and 14 months to even get a date for court because of the backlogs in the court system.

Above-the-guideline rent increases should be capped or limited to exceptional circumstances. Guideline increases—this 1% to 2.5%—should be more than sufficient to fund basic repairs, and the landlord should not be able, year after year, to seek increases above those guidelines.

We think it’s important to establish the loan funds to take the funding burden of repairs off the landlord and tenant. They would have this fund available to them that they could access, and hopefully that would make the repairs get completed in a more timely manner.

Closing the loopholes in rent control is an important issue, cracking down on the slum landlords. Too many landlords get away with delaying repairs, treating tenants unfairly and renting out units with bed bugs.

Under our platform, we would have cracked down on these practices by licensing the landlords with six units or more and taking away their licence if they did not keep their buildings in good repair. The Liberal government has failed in this area.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing: because of the tens of thousands of people who are now stuck in run-down and unaffordable apartments, and they’re waiting for years—as many as 10 years or longer—for affordable housing units.

The Liberal government has not promised to build a single new affordable housing unit. In their eight-year-old platform, they promised to build 10,000 units per year, but they were only able to, I think, get to 40% of that promise.

Reduce the cost of heating and hydro: We’ve been talking about that. We heard our NDP leader speak about that today and about giving people just that little break of taking the HST off of home heating costs that would go a long way to helping people struggling as tenants in rental units in this province, but the Liberals seem to be content to let the cost of heating and hydro increase.

Once again, the United Nations has declared that all people have the right to decent, affordable housing, as has the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Canada has

ratified a treaty with the United Nations, and the NDP has fought, and will continue to fight, to ensure that the fundamental right to housing is recognized in Ontario law.

The Liberals voted down an amendment to their recent housing act, back with Bill 140, that would have recognized housing as a human right.

Speaker, those are my comments. I actually didn't think that I could get up here and speak for a whole hour on this issue, but I probably could have spoken on it for four hours, because there are so many issues and there are so many people struggling in our province. I thank you for the opportunity to talk about this important issue here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: My compliments to the member from Welland. Not only did she go for about an hour, but she has shown that she has a very in-depth knowledge of the issues, both the housing situation and on Bill 19, which is actually the bill that is for debate. I hope that some of the concerns the member has expressed indeed will be addressed as we move the bill along for reading and consultations and bring it back perhaps in an even better format.

1520

We believe we have a good piece of legislation. I have to compliment the minister for bringing it forth. But I have to say to the member for Welland—and I hope to address at length the legislation that is for debate today when I do my 20-minute presentation—on the housing situation itself, because the member has dwelled quite a bit on the housing situation, that, yes, she's quite correct when she says that it's a very, very important issue.

We cannot miss by recognizing and addressing the fact that the issue is so important and it's so big that no government alone can do justice to it. As we move along and try to keep up with construction of new units, we have to keep in mind as well that we have hundreds of thousands of units that need maintenance repairs on a continuous basis. Unless we have this long-term housing strategy, on which I had the pleasure of conducting most of the hearings throughout the province of Ontario, and unless we have the federal government on our side and continuing to support this long-term housing strategy, which is a vision shared by everyone, we cannot continue to afford to build enough housing or maintain the existing stock without affecting the very same stock.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I've listened intently to my colleague from Welland, and I look very intently to listening to the extended words from York West, particularly that long-term strategy, because my concern is that the last eight years' strategy leaves me fairly perplexed, of many things they've done. But we'll leave that till he brings his remarks and I'll comment then.

It's very apparent that the member from Welland brings a lot of compassion. She cares about the vulner-

able. She cares about poverty. It raises a good question: What about the poverty of the 60,000 jobs that they just hacked out of the horse racing industry? Many more of those people are going to probably need affordable housing because they're not going to have jobs.

She went on, and I kind of agree, to the extent that this bill, although it has some good intentions, will do little for the most vulnerable and for the residents of my community, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and the riding thereof. Even with all the legislation and so-called protections in place, some are facing a whopping \$100 increase to their monthly rent, a hike of some 20% due in part to the high energy prices, courtesy of the Liberal government's ill-conceived green energy programs, and, I should add, the 46% increase that's going to be added to each and every household in our province.

This bill will do nothing to fix the problem at Bruce county social housing. It won't help people like the McConnells and Betty Elizabeth Adams and Freeda Speer, all of whom are struggling to know how they will cover this unexpected rent increase this year.

The colleague from Welland referenced a couple of different things. She blamed Mike Harris yet again, and I think we need to move that page on. But I'll counter that by saying she also said at the same time that we need bold vision. I would suggest that if Mr. Harris had not taken the bold steps he did—

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: —we would already be over the cliff that the Liberals are heading us down with our deficit and the debt concern that we have, sir. If we don't lower our government spending significantly, and I'm talking very significantly, there will be less money for the less vulnerable, for those that are in poverty and those who do not have jobs and need more.

Currently, we're spending \$10 billion—

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my colleague from Welland as she spoke. I don't know that this is the first time she spoke for an hour, but I think it's the first time in any event that I saw her stand up and speak for an hour, and her speech was excellent. I mean, it covered literally every single point that could be made on housing and public housing in Ontario.

I do remember, going back to my own first year here in the Legislature, I was sent off to Quebec City to look at housing as it was unfolding. It was a Conservative government at that point. There was some federal initiative that was taking place in Quebec City, and I was there to hear. Of course, all of the other provinces and territories grabbed hold of the housing plan and ran with it, and Ontario, to its shame at that point and since then, did not.

So my friend from Welland has quite correctly pointed out that today you have housing in Ontario with many people living in substandard places, where there are cockroaches and mice and bed bugs and leaky roofs and the whole plethora of things that people are forced to live

in, and the state of disrepair is enormous. There isn't even enough money to, if you would, download to the province to allow them to have inspectors go out and make sure the housing is kept up to at least a minimum level of human habitation.

She also talked about landlord licensing. That is an idea whose time has come, because some of the slum landlords should not be in that business. Finally, she talked about inclusionary zoning. This would not cost the government a penny—not a penny. It would free up to municipalities that are of a mind to build appropriate housing the authority to do so. If ever there was an idea whose time has come, that one too should be on the agenda today.

My compliments to the member from Welland.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment, and I look to the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not ask a question; I will just comment.

I want to congratulate the member from Welland for her very thorough canvass of Bill 19 and the situation facing many tenants in Ontario. The Liberal government has been very strong and vigilant on the issue regarding tenants. One need only to look, several years ago when the Mike Harris government was in place, at the size of the rent increases from 1995 on; I have the numbers here. Suffice to say that over the past five years, the annual rent increase—the average has been 1.7%, which I think is reasonable. If we cap it at zero, then landlords are not going to repair the units.

But I take the side of the tenants as well. I have very concentrated sections of my riding, in Scarborough Southwest, that have a lot of tenants. One need only visit Teasdale in my riding or, as the member from Beaches—East York has spoken, Thisletown—I think it's in his riding. It's a very, very concentrated area—

Mr. Michael Prue: Crescent Town.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Crescent Town—my apologies. I've visited both sites, and they're extremely concentrated and many of the units require repair. So one of the things we, the Liberal government, have done is put funding toward capital repairs. The only problem is that the level of repairs is increasing so rapidly and we're trying our best to keep up to it—we've allocated funds toward that and we will continue to do that to try to repair the units. I agree that the federal government has to come to the table as well on this issue. Housing, I believe, is also a federal issue. If all three levels of government, including municipal, work together, I think we can start working better on this issue. But this bill is a start.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll now return to the member for Welland, who has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to all the members here today for their comments.

With respect to Mike Harris, I think I'll continue to blame Mike Harris as long as I'm here. You know, I kind

of lived and worked in the Mike Harris regime as it related to labour in those days. To pick on the most vulnerable in our society, those on ODSP, and cut them by 22%—I can remember the cans of tuna story; you know, they could get this basket of food and get 79-cent-a-can tuna, and they would be able to make up for the \$200 they were losing by just being very careful about their dietary budget.

But I also picked on our own government in 1991 when I talked about the exemption of the 50,000 or 60,000 units. At that time, the province was in a deep recession, and the NDP, who were the government at the time, thought that exempting those units after a certain date would actually cause some new development and some new units being developed. So I think I'm parceling out my complaints—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Fairly.

1530

Ms. Cindy Forster: Fairly, yes. I picked on the Liberals as well.

But, you know, the advocates have told me that rents here in the city of Toronto in the last few years have increased dramatically in units that are not rent controlled. For some that were \$800, people are living in a unit that is now exempt, and they're paying well over \$1,100. With the job situation and people being paid minimum wage and barely more than that, they can ill afford to have those types of rent increases.

I look forward to further debate on this issue as this moves on to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate on Bill 19? I recognize the member for York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I would like to thank Minister Wynne, first of all, for introducing the bill itself and for her comments to the bill and as well to the people of Ontario. As the minister said earlier, this proposed legislation is just one more example of the work that this government is doing to help make housing more affordable for the people of Ontario. This is why we are taking action to stabilize the rent increase guideline.

As mentioned, the proposed amendment, if passed, would mean that the annual rent increase guideline would be capped at 2.5% and would not fall below 1% per year. This approach would provide stability and predictability for both renters and tenants. The reason why, Mr. Speaker: If we look at the history of the consumer price index over the last several years, from 1975 to 1986 it fluctuated between 4% and 8% per year; from 1987 to 1999, the guideline fluctuated from a bottom of 2.8% to 5.4% per year; and from 2000 to 2012, from a low of 0.7% to a high of 3.9%.

Stabilizing the rent increase guideline is just one more step in continuing the work government is doing to meet the variety of affordable housing needs that exist in this province. While the proposed amendment would help low-income renters, our government is also hard at work to address other issues to make housing more affordable in Ontario.

Speaker, affordable housing is a lot more than just bricks and mortar. I am sure that all of my colleagues here today would agree that access to affordable housing is crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty. Responsive community-based housing services are crucial for those caught in poverty or suffering from mental illness. Our government heard that message consistently in the consultation for the poverty reduction strategy and the long-term affordable housing strategy. As Minister Wynne has said many times in her meetings with stakeholders and her remarks to industry, safe, adequate and affordable housing is a key factor in determining health and in having a positive impact on the education of our children.

We know that someone's struggle with housing issues may reflect underlying problems that have not been addressed, such as mental illness, addiction or isolation. That is why we announced last June a comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy to better coordinate services across the province and respond to clients' needs. It is one of this government's priorities to help build a pathway out of poverty for those in need and work towards improving community support. Affordable housing is one of the stepping stones to building that pathway.

As you have already heard, the Housing Services Act, 2011, replaced the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000. The Housing Services Act, 2011, allows for more flexible decision-making at the local level, particularly regarding local housing and homelessness plans. There are new accountability requirements to help ensure that housing resources are used in the best way possible to deliver results for people.

We realize that if investments are going to be made, it is imperative that the funds are used appropriately. This means that local needs are assessed and programs are implemented to best meet the needs of a municipality or region. It also means that where the money goes and how it benefits Ontarians is done transparently.

As a first step to implementing our long-term affordable housing strategy, we are looking at consolidating some of our housing and homelessness programs. This approach would streamline the system and enable funding to be used in a much more flexible manner. It puts the decision-making in our municipal partners' hands and allows them to use the funds in ways that will best meet their specific regional needs.

This is an example of how our innovative people-first strategy would work. Housing programs would be flexible and tailored to different needs, and tax dollars would be used more efficiently.

The rent increase guideline amendment also helps to put people first by providing renters with increased financial stability from year to year and ensuring that Ontario families know what their monthly expenses are going to be.

The new federal-provincial Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario funding agreement that the minister signed with her federal counterpart on November 8,

2011, supports the goals set out in our long-term affordable housing strategy to address the diverse affordable housing needs in the province. It is an agreement that will have far-reaching benefits for many Ontarians, even if they personally do not need affordable housing.

We are committed to working to address a variety of housing needs in this province, from homeowners, renters, shelter victims of family violence, to affordable housing for low-income families.

As Minister Wynne said at the signing ceremony, "This agreement will create thousands of jobs for families across the province and will benefit all communities in need. When we get individuals and families into safe and affordable housing we are improving their health, making our neighbourhoods safer and increasing young Ontarians' opportunities to prosper."

The Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program is a four-year initiative and represents a combined investment of some \$481 million from the province of Ontario and the government of Canada. Funding will be provided through this new agreement to create and repair affordable housing and provide rental and down payment assistance to families to make housing more affordable. This funding agreement will also provide increased flexibility, with accountability, to service managers who are the local housing administrators, housing proponents and other housing partners to deliver affordable housing in their communities. This agreement will create over 5,000 new jobs and will build or repair approximately 7,000 affordable housing units over four years in Ontario. That's the size of Acton or the city of Hanover.

The Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program builds on our record of providing \$2.5 billion in affordable housing, more than any previous government. This allocation will build and repair more than 270,000 units and will provide some 35,000 rent supplements. To date, Ontario's housing investments since 2003 have created over 57,000 jobs across the province.

Under the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program, municipal partners will be allocated a notional amount of funds which may be used to address local housing priorities. Service managers, including district social service administration boards, are able to choose from a menu of program components that they can tailor to local priorities.

Funding may be used for the construction of new affordable rental units. It may be used for down payment assistance for low- to moderate-income households considering the purchase of a home.

Funding may also be used to provide subsidies to landlords to reduce the cost of rental units available to low-income tenants. This is called the rent supplement component.

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The housing allowance may be used to provide subsidies directly to low-income tenants in rental units. Additionally, it can be used as assistance for repairs and renovations, to maintain the affordability and improve

accessibility of individual dwelling units and multi-unit buildings. Specifically, under the northern repair component, assistance may be provided for repairs and renovations to individual homes and multi-unit buildings in northern Ontario.

Under the Ontario Renovates component, funds may be allocated for repairs and renovations to individual homes and multi-unit buildings across the province. As I have stated, this gives municipalities who deliver the services on the front line more flexibility to use existing resources to meet local housing needs.

Recognizing that the off-reserve aboriginal community is particularly disadvantaged in the housing market, and building on the success of the existing Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust program, the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program includes a component aimed directly at the off-reserve aboriginal community. This component will be delivered by aboriginal program administrators. In total, the ministry has allocated more than \$26 million for the provision of housing for off-reserve aboriginal families. Similar to the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust program, we have allocated 25% of the funding for the greater Toronto area and 75% for the rest of the province.

This program is a great example of our long-term affordable housing strategy in action. A goal of our long-term affordable housing strategy is to make it easier for Ontario families to find and maintain affordable housing. It recognizes that funding needs to be flexible and that consideration must be given to the diversity of communities of all sizes, be they urban, rural, in the north or Far North, because different communities have different priorities and needs.

Unlike earlier housing programs, the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program provides increased flexibility with appropriate accountability for our municipal partners. In other words, the ministry does not prescribe how much funding must be dedicated to each program component. This is an important feature of this program. As you have already heard, our consultations on the long-term affordable housing strategy told us that the existing housing system was too complicated and created barriers for people in need. And the people who deliver housing programs told us they are unable to develop the best possible services because of dated provincial rules.

We are improving the affordable housing system from the ground up, building a strong foundation based on four key pillars: putting people first, creating strong partnerships, supporting affordable options and accountability. Last year, our Housing Services Act, 2011, was passed, the legislative framework of our long-term affordable housing strategy. This new legislation supports better decision-making at the local level, particularly through the requirement for local housing and homelessness plans.

The Housing Services Act, 2011, supports a community-centred approach where housing services are flexible, adapt to the different needs of local communities

and do a better job of helping people. The Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program builds on the success of the affordable housing program, an earlier federal-provincial initiative. The key objectives of that program were to improve access to affordable housing that is safe, sound, suitable and sustainable for households across Ontario; provide service manager and housing components with the flexibility to meet local needs and priorities; and incorporate energy efficiency requirements and accessibility into affordable housing units and building design.

Since 2003, our government's investment of more than \$2.5 billion means we have built and repaired more than 270,000 units and provided 35,000 rent supplements for Ontario families in need. To date, Speaker, Ontario's housing investments since 2003 have created over 57,000 jobs across the province.

Our long-term affordable housing strategy provides more flexibility to achieve better results for people. This complements and supports our new vision for affordable housing: helping to build a strong foundation and better future for Ontario families while stimulating the economy in communities across the province.

Speaker, this government understands that affordable housing opens doors to a better and brighter future for everyone. It allows Ontarians to focus on their jobs, education and the security of their families.

What we learned from our consultation for our long-term affordable housing strategy is that a good housing strategy must be focused on people. The rent increase guideline amendment supports that vision.

As the minister said, we believe that passing this proposed legislation would do a great deal to help those Ontario renters who say that they worry about paying the rent each month. We need to take steps to make housing more affordable and ensure that Ontario's most vulnerable citizens have a safe, stable and secure environment to call home—a place that allows them to focus on their health and well-being and the education and happiness of their children and allows them the best possible chance to contribute to society.

I urge the members to support second reading of Bill 19 and help make the rent increase guideline more stable and predictable.

Speaker, as I was saying in response to the member from Welland before, I do hope that the bill will go through the House as it's being debated today and that we will have an opportunity to indeed, not only through the committee, have a wider discussion among all the members of the House, but to hear further from those stakeholders that indeed have a stake in this particular piece of legislation.

Minister Wynne did say during the introduction of the bill the other day, and she did repeat it many times, that some of the contents of the bill that are expressed in the bill are a result of those particular consultations which we had throughout the province with the various stakeholders.

I think it's now two years ago, Speaker, when I was part of doing the consultation on the long-term affordable

housing strategy. I remember that in Hamilton, for example, we had a full house of people, as we had in Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Peterborough. Actually, one of the major components of the bill today is because of those consultations, where people said, "From month to month, from year to year, we have no idea what our rent is going to be." As the member from Welland well said, people are worried, not only if they have a job, but it's how to pay. It is because we wanted to give these renters peace of mind; that now they have four years where they can say, "My rent: I know how much it's going to be every time there's going to be an increase." Of course, there is protection, as well, that when the landlord wants to increase the rent, he has to give, I believe, 90 days' notice, so it's not a shock. Therefore, I think it's important for families in Ontario to know, and to know in advance, that it's going to be a rental increase.

Why do we have a bottom of 1% to 2.5%? As I said before, we had a high of 6% or 8% increases, and that is a real shock to tenants. Therefore, today, Speaker, in order to maintain the existing stock in good condition, good repair—and yes, there are still a lot of units out there that are in completely dilapidated condition. At least landlords will have some money coming in to maintain those repairs and give peace of mind to tenants in saying, "My rent will not go up more than 2.5%." If there is some accord between the landlord and the tenants—they do not wish to abide by the 1%—by all means, that is an agreement that is free; it's up to the tenant and the landlord to conduct an agreement.

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But Speaker, I believe this piece of legislation goes a long way to give our families peace of mind, to concentrate on their jobs, to concentrate on growing their families, on doing other things, having the kids participate in recreation facilities. It is peace of mind that is important for our tenants, and this particular piece of legislation will go a long way in providing that to our people, the tenants of Ontario.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I've been listening to the member York West, in his speech, talking about Bill 19, which is An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline. Frankly, I thought he was talking about some other bill because he was going on about affordable housing, homelessness and all kinds of things with the federal government. This bill is a one-page bill, and it basically does one thing; that is, put a floor of a 1% increase of rent to a ceiling of 2.5%, and that's about it. I'm not quite sure what the member from York West's speech was all about, but the bill is one page, and that's what it deals with.

Mr. Speaker, I should say the thing that I'm hearing most in my riding from people in terms of housing is about the huge increases in hydro bills that people are faced with paying. For some people it's as high as 75% just in the last couple of years, and that's making it very difficult for them to afford to stay in their homes. Of

course, we know that the main cause of that increase in hydro rates is the McGuinty government's Green Energy Act, which is forecasted to raise rates another 46% in the next five years. That's what I'm hearing.

I hear from quite a few small landlords in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. They come in and see me and tell me horror stories, where they have tenants who know the rules; they go through the fact that they haven't paid the bill, then they draw out the eviction process, then they end up damaging the unit, and they lose their shirt on it. They tell me there's not enough balance on the landlord's side of this, particularly for the small landlords—they're not necessarily all that professional or don't necessarily know all the rules.

So it seems to me that we need a little bit more balance for the small landlords, because if we want to have rental accommodation out there, we need these small landlords to be able to feel like they're protected and not losing their shirt every time they rent an accommodation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Good afternoon, and thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite from York West for his delivery on Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act.

I did find one comment very interesting in the House today that was spoken by the member from Welland, about making housing a human right. That's something that's a basic need for every human. When I was in school we talked about shelter and food; they're two basic human survival elements that you need to make it in this world. So having housing as a human right is certainly something that we all need to remember, that everyone should have a home to live in.

I also recall last week that a member talked about a speech that was given for CBC—a young girl was talking about what a home is—and that the speech was really endearing. They talked about that the home is physical, but also a home is family, the people that live in it and the memories that you create, so everyone deserves to have a place where they feel safe, that's affordable.

This bill does give some comfort in the fact that the rent won't go up by 6% or 10%. It's still increasing it by 1% to 2.5%, and that's a little relief, but there's always the other factors, that life in this province has become so unaffordable for many. We need to do more in respect to rent regulation and rent controls and making sure that tenants who are in a position where they are on low incomes can afford to stay in that home and have a right to a safe and secure house and affordable housing.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I had the opportunity to listen very intently to the speech from my colleague from York West. The member from York West has had a long history of housing and rental housing here in Toronto when he started his political career as a very distinguished

councillor here in Toronto and then served on Metro council.

I know that when I talk to people in Toronto today, there's a yearning to go back to what they thought was the golden era, when Metro council was in force, when there were separate cities here in Toronto and the coordinating body was through Metro council. They look fondly back on that golden era.

The member's speech today is interesting. I remind you, Mr. Speaker and members of this House, that some 37 years ago—1975—the minority government of William Grenville Davis, in co-operation with Robert Fletcher Nixon and Stephen Lewis, the first rental legislation in Ontario was passed. It was a topic of intense conversation during the provincial election of 1975.

Some 37 years later, we're building on that great legacy of Mr. Davis. I trust that my colleagues in the opposition, based on that great history with Mr. Davis and, indeed, the third party—to come together on Bill 19 to forge a consensus with this bill in terms of rental legislation control in the province of Ontario.

Indeed, of course, the member from York West spent some time talking about our affordable housing strategy since we've been engaged on it with the federal government. Let me say: Federal governments of two political stripes have worked with us, the administration of Mr. Martin and now the administration of Prime Minister Harper, knowing full well that it's important to have co-operation with provinces in the field of housing.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to comment a bit on Bill 19, legislation with respect to rent guidelines. As has been pointed out, it's obviously bare bones legislation. It's pretty sparse. I'm actually not clear why this could not be done through regulation. To take our time with a bill like this—it might be more palatable if there had been some ideas or some policy presented in this piece of legislation for all of us to consider.

I know that the member for York West indicated that the bill was as a result of consultation. I was not aware of any meetings down my way with respect to this legislation. I'm not sure to what extent landlords were consulted as far as these guidelines. But I'll take it as presented: It's the result of consultations.

I feel that this legislation is actually a result of the HST. That has a very significant impact on people who have houses or apartment buildings. It's obviously an impact on tenants. Someone does have to pay the extra burden of this tax. I just got the snow removal bill for my office. I was kind of taken aback at how much it cost, given the warm winter that we had. But you now pay additional tax on things like snow removal, landscaping, obviously any repairs or maintenance ongoing, certainly with older buildings. I think most of the buildings are, on average, 40 years old.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I now return to the member for York West, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to thank the members for their comments: my colleague from Peterborough here, Haldimand–Norfolk, London–Fanshawe and Parry Sound–Muskoka—this beautiful piece of country that is most cherished, not so much by renters, because it has become very unaffordable, I would say. Perhaps the only thing that is most common in their renting may be the cottage or a cottage for a week or so during the summer. But other than that, I have to say that it's a beautiful part of our country, and the member from that particular area has addressed the content of this bill.

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It is not so much the one page or two pages of the bill, but it is the content of the bill itself. Let me say this: This is exactly what the tenants were looking for, and I'm very pleased that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has delivered today so that they have peace of mind. Now, for the next four years they know that their rent will not go any higher than 2.5%.

Let me remind the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka that I was sitting on the other side where he's sitting today and I remember so vividly seeing Mr. Al Leach, the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, where the next day they came into the House after the election and they cancelled all the housing policies, period, including those projects with funding and with a building permit. So I have to say that no government, other than this particular government today, has done so much more for building affordable housing or providing housing and protection for tenants in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We are debating Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, for one main reason: the HST. The HST, as you will recall, added costs to many services that landlords require: snow removal, now subject to HST; landscaping, now subject to HST; home improvement services, now subject to HST; hydro, in many cases, subject to HST, and the list goes on.

The PC caucus warned the government about the risks of the HST and the new costs that it would impose on landlords. The McGuinty Liberals ignored the warnings. They pushed new costs on landlords, leaving them with little choice but to raise rents. So often that seems to be this government's attitude: Let somebody else pay. But we know that it usually doesn't work that way, to let somebody else pay.

It's one of the reasons I ran for office, to try to correct this attitude that the government is free to spend without restraint because, after all, somebody can pay. The people of Ontario have paid dearly for this approach.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I want to use the rest of my time during this debate to deliver my maiden speech.

It is an honour and a privilege to represent the people of Perth–Wellington. Our first and foremost responsibility is to the people of our ridings, our constituents. We're here to serve them.

Bert Johnson knew that well. Many will remember Bert, who served as the MPP for Perth–Middlesex from 1995 to 2004, and as Deputy Speaker of the House. Like me, Bert comes from a farming background. He once remarked that when a farmer finishes plowing his field at the end of the day, he can look around and see his work. However, Bert noted that after a long day at Queen's Park, it might not always be possible to see the plowed field.

Jean Wilson taught me the importance of public service. Mrs. Wilson was my English and civics teacher at Ridgetown College, where I graduated in 1968. Her lesson was this: No matter what you do, no matter where you go, get involved in your community. It was, for me, a very important lesson. Whether coaching hockey, serving in municipal government or volunteering, you'll get so much out of it and, most importantly, you'll benefit your community. That's what I've tried to do as a long-time member of the Monkton Lions Club, that's what I've tried to do as a member of the Monkton arena building committee, and that's what I've tried to do in municipal politics.

In 2003, I was privileged to have been elected to council in the municipality of North Perth, where I served two terms. Municipal politics is something of a family tradition. My father served on council in Grey township in Huron county.

Family is important to me. I grew up on a farm in Essex county, until my family bought a dairy farm near Monkton, Ontario. For 39 years I've been married to my wife, Jane. Together, we've operated a decorating business and raised our three boys, who are now married with children of their own. I want to thank Jane, and I want to thank our entire family for their strong support along the journey to Queen's Park. I couldn't have done it without them. When we have free time, Jane and I like to spend it with our grandchildren. But free time can be hard to find, and I'm sure my colleagues would agree.

Public service compels us to serve our constituents to the best of our ability. It requires us to listen, to assist where possible and to act on their behalf. Before the last election, I knew it was time to act. I was disappointed with many of the policies of this government. It was spending too much and listening too little. It failed to listen to small and rural communities, in particular when it passed the so-called Green Energy Act. That legislation concentrated power in Toronto, grabbing it from municipalities and giving it to the McGuinty government. That was wrong.

From my experience on municipal council, I also knew about problems with MPAC and OMPF, for example. The government assured us that they would be fixed, but they weren't fixed, and municipalities continue to pay the price. We couldn't count on the government to follow through on their promises, and I thought it was time for a government that would.

Knowing that our kids were grown up and remembering that important lesson from Mrs. Wilson, I knew I needed to run. I knew I needed to make a difference

where I could. It's an honour to represent the people of the great riding of Perth–Wellington.

We are home to a thriving agricultural industry. It's an honour to represent farmers and to stand up for their interests. We're making progress through initiatives like business risk management, which I've long supported along with the PC caucus. But farmers know that now is not the time to stand still. It's time to take a real look at red tape that is strangling too many jobs in too many rural communities.

We're home to a thriving arts community. Perth–Wellington has two world-class theatre companies, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the Drayton festival. It's an honour to represent everyone who works in the cultural industry and everybody who appreciates its value.

Perth–Wellington is also home to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. I want to encourage all members to visit the hall of fame this summer and spend some time in beautiful St Marys.

Perth–Wellington is also home to the largest Irish festival in North America. For 35 years, Listowel has held Paddyfest, a celebration of Irish heritage and culture. Paddyfest is a celebration lasting two weeks. It features a parade, a gala fundraising event and many bowls of homemade Irish stew made by local church groups. Paddyfest raises upwards of \$100,000 for charitable projects. I want to congratulate Matt Edgar, chairman of this year's Paddyfest, and the many volunteers who made this year's Paddyfest such a success.

We also remembered last year's Paddyfest, when tragedy struck. Two volunteer firefighters, Ray Walter and Ken Rea, died while fighting a fire at a local store. They made the ultimate sacrifice. Shaken, the community came together. We supported the families of the fallen firefighters, and we supported all the firefighters in North Perth.

Perth–Wellington is home to a strong manufacturing base. It is an honour to represent everyone in that sector. Our local manufacturers have so much to offer and have driven so much of the prosperity that we in Perth–Wellington have historically enjoyed.

Today, however, Ontario has a manufacturing crisis. In fact, since the McGuinty government came to power, a staggering 293,700 manufacturing jobs have vanished. Meanwhile, Ontario's overall unemployment rate has been above the national average for 62 consecutive months.

Perth–Wellington is not immune. Last year, we learned that the FRAM plant in Stratford would close, meaning the loss of 300 jobs. Just last week, our community suffered another blow: Cooper Standard in Mitchell announced 107 layoffs.

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We must do better, Mr. Speaker. People expect the government to fix what isn't working and adopt new policies that would attract and sustain our manufacturing sector. The government could start by backing off on its

expensive energy experiments and return energy costs to competitive levels, but they've refused.

For too many constituents, this is a challenging time. Coping with the rising costs of living or, worse, a job loss is a struggle. Every day our office receives letters, emails and phone calls from across the riding and beyond. Some are calling with good news: an anniversary, a celebration of some sort. But very often people call wanting to express their concerns about a problem they face or about a problem the government is unwilling to confront.

I've already expressed a few of their concerns, and I want to take this opportunity to voice a few more. People are concerned about the future of their schools and hospitals. They demand high-quality care, and they need it close to home. I want to again express my support for every hospital in Perth-Wellington and the service they provide.

Last Friday, I attended the grand opening of the MRI suite at Stratford General Hospital. The Minister of Health was there too. This much-needed medical technology wouldn't have come to Stratford without strong community support. I want to thank the hospital foundation for their outstanding work. Over 10,000 donors contributed over 30,000 gifts to the Heart and Soul campaign. They set an ambitious goal of raising \$20 million, and they've gone way beyond it.

I am also looking forward to attending the grand opening of the Fisher Family Primary Care Centre in Listowel. This innovative approach to family medicine is an asset to our community, but we still face challenges in health care. Too many are still without a family doctor. Too many in Perth-Wellington, especially in Stratford, don't have one, and we're asking the Minister of Health for help. Many of our constituents remain concerned about the future of emergency care at St. Marys Memorial Hospital. They're asking for the emergency department to remain open 24/7.

Our highway infrastructure is also on the minds of many constituents, and here's what we need from the Minister of Transportation: Many people from Stratford to the outskirts of New Hamburg have expressed concerns about the future of Highways 7 and 8. The ministry has selected a route to rebuild the highway, but many people have concerns, including the impact of a new highway on local agriculture. And many are concerned about the safety on the existing route. I plan to help ensure that the ministry hears all of my constituents' values.

My constituents are also expressing their views about this government's changes to the Ontario Trillium benefit, changes that have left some of our most vulnerable citizens without the refunds they had rightly expected. From a government running a \$16-billion deficit, they're being told that they can't manage their own money. That's incredible.

On March 14, I hosted a public wind energy town hall meeting. I am grateful to the member from Nipissing and the member from Huron-Bruce for their support and participation in that community event. People came from

across the riding to express their sincere and very serious concerns about the McGuinty government's wind-power-at-any-cost policy. They believe the McGuinty government is ignoring them, and I believe they're right.

I've already spoken about another group that matters to me—my grandchildren. I'm concerned about the mountain of debt they will inherit and I'm concerned that the present government has no credible plan to pay it down. We're already borrowing \$1.8 million every hour to cover the Liberals' deficit. Worse yet, the Liberals still appear to be on track to double the deficit to \$30 billion.

We in Perth-Wellington recognize the important values of personal responsibility and living within your means. We understand that principle as it applies to our households and our businesses. We don't understand it when a government tells us that somehow it shouldn't apply to them.

When the government doesn't live within its means, when taxes go up, our economy is threatened. When the cost of energy goes up, jobs disappear. For me, that's the lesson of the past eight years.

It wasn't always that way. There was a time when Ontario was the economic engine of Canada. I refuse to believe that those days are over and that we should give up hope. Our leader and our caucus have advanced ideas, including reducing red tape, reforming the apprenticeship system and lowering energy costs. These policies would help rebuild Ontario's economy. They would help ensure that the future can be brighter than the past.

Whatever our party and whatever our background, we should always look for ways to build strong communities: large and small, urban and rural. I've already mentioned a few examples of people doing just that. They're doing it in the arts community. They're doing it in health care, in business and in our community festivals.

In the time I have left, I want to mention just a few more.

Gary Fizell was a good friend of mine and a leader on the Monkton Wildcats hockey team. He suffered from ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. When Gary's health declined, he and his family had to move into a more accessible home. The community came to their aid, raising money for a new home that could accommodate Gary. Sadly, after a 10-year battle, Gary passed away. To this day, the community holds a fundraiser in his honour. All proceeds are donated to ALS research.

Harvest for Hunger is another example of service to the community. One hundred and twenty combines took the field to set a world record for harvesting 160 acres of soybeans. They narrowly missed the mark, but finished in just 11 minutes and 49 seconds. More important, they did it to raise awareness and raise funds to fight hunger. In total, they raised over \$1 million.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, we should all look for ways to keep the focus where it belongs: on service to the community. We should support it and we should lead it, whenever and wherever there is a need. We should promote its value at every opportunity and encourage that spirit in others.

As MPP for Perth–Wellington, keeping in mind Jean Wilson's belief in the importance of public service, I intend to do my part.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to congratulate and officially welcome the member from Perth–Wellington. I believe that was his maiden speech in this House. We certainly appreciate his comments today. I think he raises a couple of interesting points that we've heard raised throughout the last session and prior to us actually being in this House.

One was on the HST. Certainly, New Democrats have, from the inception, from the beginning, fought against the HST, not only in this House but at the federal level, where it was imposed and a deal was brokered between the province and the feds. So we agree on that point.

Hydro rates, of course: We fought that one too from the beginning, when we saw the deregulation and privatization of our Ontario Hydro regime start to add incredible stress and burdens to manufacturing, to homeowners, to residents and to communities. That's certainly where the dominoes started falling, in our opinion.

I will mention as well that I had the pleasure of having dinner with the member's cousin at a recent event this past weekend, at a wild game dinner put on by the sportsmen's club in Woodslee. It was a great wild game dinner. We talked a little bit of politics, talked a little bit of farming, and talked about how honourable the member is. I know he has deep connections within this province that extend into my riding, even, of Essex.

All told, I think the member raises some questions that we've heard time and time again here in terms of where this government is heading, how it's going to make life more affordable, or does it even intend to make life more affordable in this province for people and for businesses? It is ultimately how we get to that point that will be the challenge for us all. It may be that we have to go through another election, and successive elections, to finally get there. But maybe we can avoid that and all work together in this House towards a common goal.

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

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Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always enlightening to hear a maiden speech, to the member from Perth–Wellington. Perth–Wellington, I know, as a great Montreal Canadiens fan—hard times this particular season, a little like the Toronto Maple Leafs. But of course the great Howie Morenz, better known as the Stratford Streak, came from Stratford, Ontario, father-in-law of Bernie Geoffrion, who was the great Canadiens star in the 1950s, along with Béliveau and Richard and Dickie Moore.

And of course the famous Stratford Festival attracts people from all over the world to see some of the best entertainment put on by actors and actresses.

A number of years ago, many of us in this House had the opportunity to be on the Carson farm in that riding for the International Plowing Match that attracted people

from right across the province of Ontario to enjoy the great hospitality that the riding of Perth–Wellington has to offer. My friend across the aisle was there. I didn't see him that day, but I know he was enjoying, as I said, the great hospitality that Perth–Wellington has to offer.

To the member from Perth–Wellington, we all experience the first time when you step into this august chamber. I know when I came here in 2003—when you think about it for one moment, the very select men and women who have served in this chamber from 1867 to 2012, it is a very select group of people. We take on the great responsibilities of representing our ridings, and I know my friend the member from Perth–Wellington will continue in the great tradition, as his predecessors before him, putting together the thoughts and the needs of the people in that riding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm really pleased to respond to the member from Perth–Wellington's maiden speech comments today. I think he sort of follows in line with a lot of good people that we've seen represent that particular riding in this Legislature. I know my colleague Bert Johnson, in his first term and my first term here, was a person I really enjoyed. He spent a lot of time as the Deputy Speaker, and John Wilkinson became a friend as well, on the government side. All these gentlemen, including Mr. Pettapiece, represent the best interests of their community.

And let's face it, that is one of the more beautiful farming communities and diverse communities in our province. I've been through there a number of times. When my daughter went to the University of Western Ontario we used to come back up through there when we dropped her off, and I was always amazed at the size and the quality of the farms in that area. Then, of course, to join with that, they've got something like the Drayton festival, which also has a theatre in my riding, in Penetanguishene, but also the Stratford Festival, which is one of the key festivals in our whole country today.

I wish him well in his time here at Queen's Park. I like the fact that he's very grounded to his family and community, and that's probably why he's the MPP today and will likely be the MPP for a number of years.

Finally, I want to say that the first time I had an opportunity to meet with him myself, I was critic for Community Safety and Correctional Services. He brought it up in his comments here, the two volunteer firefighters that lost their lives in Listowel in that tragic fire, something that just really brings you back to home in rural Ontario when you see that happening. I was actually at the funeral with Mr. Pettapiece.

I just want to say, overall, I wish him all the best in his time here at Queen's Park. Congratulations on a great maiden speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to be able to reply to the maiden speech of the member from Perth–

Wellington. I was writing down notes and about to launch into how much we agreed that we hated the HST when I found out it was a maiden speech. The member and I spend a fair bit of time talking about crops because we're both farmers. I really enjoy that. Today we were talking about how in Perth–Wellington they're planting and how we are still wondering whether we should take off the snow blower. Perth–Wellington is one of the few areas that I am truly jealous of. It is a beautiful place.

A lot of people know a lot of history about Perth–Wellington, but there's one thing that I know that maybe some of the other members don't. There's a road in Perth–Wellington—and I don't know the name of the road, but I know it exists—that produces more milk than anywhere else in the province. I think it's something—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I don't know what it's called, but I know, because I've heard about it a lot of times on the DFO board.

Something else we share is, we've both hosted a plowing match in our area, and we both did a very good job. I attended the plowing match at Carson's farm. It was an incredible event. It's one of the places where I learned how you should run a plowing match.

I'd like to congratulate you and the people who helped you volunteer. Something you mentioned in your speech several times is the volunteer ethic. It takes that type of ethic to get elected. It takes that type of ethic to do a job like this. In the short time I've known you, I think we share that as well.

I look forward to working with the member. I would like to say that I don't always agree with all of his views, but I look forward to working with him. We do agree that the HST is one of the things that's pushing up rental in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Perth–Wellington for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker, and thanks to everybody else, all of you, for your comments. It was certainly appreciated.

I've been a volunteer since I joined a Lions Club in Monkton, on an official basis, for almost 20 years—no, it's more than 20 years; since 1987. My family have been in the volunteer business for many years, and it has driven me to not only get involved in municipal politics but, certainly, in this area too. We expect no reward, but I've been to a number of volunteer events in our riding where certificates were handed out for years of service and different things like that. There's nothing wrong with giving somebody a pat on the back. Volunteers work for nothing—usually it costs them money—and it's nice to give them a pat on the back once in a while.

Ontario is a wonderful place to live. We're certainly proud of the areas we live in. We've had many accomplishments in Perth–Wellington over the years, and I'm sure all the members have had significant accomplishments in their areas over the years. Plowing matches are

one of them. We've actually got one coming up next year, in 2013. It's going to be in the Mitchell area. I'm very proud of the fact that we don't stop at one; we just keep on going.

Anyway, it's certainly an honour to represent the riding. I hope that we can work successfully with all three parties in the House to try to achieve not only debt reduction but making our communities a better place to live, so that our children do have a future as they're looking forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am quite excited to add my voice to this discussion as well, to debate on G19, the government's Bill 19.

We've already heard some of the purpose of this bill. To begin with, it's important to recognize that applying a cap or making some step in the right direction to make housing more affordable is a positive step. I think we can all agree with that. I think all our comments are going to echo the fact that this is a step but it's a small step. The concern is that a lot of work needs to be done in this area, particularly when it comes to affordable housing.

Some of the big concerns are these: A vast number of people are spending half of their income on housing, and when housing is so expensive, when it consumes half of your income, it cuts into your ability to afford other necessities. That's essentially a risk factor, one of the largest risk factors that impacts those who are most vulnerable in our society. It affects the poor; it affects women; it affects people who are in dire or desperate circumstances.

While the bill proposes to set the increase to be held at 1% to 2.5%, let's look at some of the issues that affect Ontarians across the province with respect to their circumstances and affordable housing in general.

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There are 1,301,395 tenant households in Ontario. Those people who are affected by rent, or the increase in rent, constitute one third of our province's population. Essentially, one in five, or 20%, of Ontarians pay 50% or more of their household income on shelter costs. That's a sizable number of people who are spending that half of their income, as I indicated, on their rent. What that results in is that other necessities—child care, medicine, food, clothing—other basic necessities are then pushed to the back. They have to make these crucial decisions on whether they can afford to pay their rent or whether they can afford to put food on the table, pay for medicine, pay for their necessities.

What's of even greater concern is that there are 152,077 low-income households across Ontario who are waiting for social housing, and this number, at 7.4%, is increasing. The real concern here, the real problem, is that we have a housing crisis, particularly an affordable housing crisis, which is not being addressed. It's important to put a cap on the rent increases, but again, that's a small step in addressing the really crushing problem of affordable housing.

The United Nations, in article 25, indicates that housing is not simply a luxury or a privilege. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates—declares—that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services....” So, in fact, the notion of having housing is not a luxury, it’s not an esoteric concept—it’s a fundamental right that a human being should have as a shelter. That’s something that we should appreciate as a right, recognize as a right.

The reason for this is that it’s a positive right; it requires that the state do something to ensure that its populace, its people, are taken care of at least at that minimal level, those who are vulnerable, those who can’t take care of themselves, those who have special needs, that at a basic level, at a fundamental level, we have a responsibility to ensure that everyone has adequate housing. It’s something that’s been declared as a human right, and it’s something that we should uphold.

What’s particularly concerning is that in Ontario the Liberals voted down an amendment to their recent housing act that would have recognized this as a human right. And why it’s so important to recognize housing as a human right is that it adds the necessary gravity to the situation. It adds the necessary level of importance to the notion that we should house our citizens, we should ensure that they have a roof over their heads.

The NDP has fought, and will continue to fight, to ensure that this fundamental right, the right to housing, is recognized in Ontario law. That’s something that I stand behind. I hope to see the day where it is recognized as a human right.

I’d like to turn now and discuss some of the specific issues that are affecting my riding in Bramalea–Gore–Malton and in the Peel region in general. I can tell you that time and time again constituents have come to my office and have expressed their concern over the fact that there are not spaces available for them, for their family members, for people who are living with extra needs and have special needs and require particularly unique housing criteria or requirements—that there is simply not space available for them.

There are a number of people who have come to me with complaints that they don’t have a place which is clean, a place which is warm enough; they don’t have a roof over their heads where they can access the services that they require. Many people are forced to make do with housing that doesn’t have the necessary accessibility, but are making do without that and putting themselves in difficult situations simply to get into and out of their homes. It’s something that should generate great concern in our minds, that we have this lack or this inability to house our constituents in our community.

In Peel region there were 15,301 households—15,000—on the waiting list for social assistance in 2011. That’s 10.1% of the total active households on the list. There are people who are on waiting lists for years—for 10 years—and they haven’t been able to find adequate

housing. The service manager area of Peel region indicates that singles and families on the chronological waiting list are not gaining access to subsidized housing and are waiting longer and longer on these lists. As I indicated, some people have waited 10 years. In fact, some of the approximate wait times for social housing are estimated up to 15 years, which is among the highest in the province.

Peel region is a growing demographic. It’s an area with booming population, booming new houses, but what’s lacking in the growth of that region is affordable housing. Peel region is ranked in the top five areas experiencing the largest increase in the number of households waiting for housing. While the population is booming, while we have growth in the housing market in general, we have an unacceptable level of delay or waiting time to access social housing for people who are in the most dire circumstances, those who are in the most difficult and vulnerable positions in society.

So it’s a real concern. It’s a live issue. It’s an issue that has a face. It’s the face of the poor, it’s the face of children, it’s the face of women. They are left without adequate housing, and they are left waiting for a decade. Imagine waiting more than a decade to have adequate housing. It’s simply unacceptable—I welcome the new Speaker—and it’s not something we should accept in this province. It’s something that we should make a clear stand on here and now that affordable housing is a priority, it’s a real need and something that’s not been addressed. In fact, the government has been very ineffective in addressing a long-term solution to this housing crisis, particularly when it comes to affordable housing.

After eight years, the government finally developed a long-term affordable housing strategy, but its strategy did not include funding, did not include any targets and didn’t include any timelines. So we have a strategy after eight years of waiting, but the strategy has very little meaning when there aren’t specific funding targets and there aren’t specific timelines.

What is of grave concern, addressing our budget, is that the proposed budget does not include any money, any funding—not a penny—for affordable housing. We must recognize that while social housing is a social benefit—it benefits those in our society, as indicated, who are most vulnerable—it also has an economic advantage. It’s something that can create jobs and stimulate local and provincial economies, and it’s also an avenue for generating greater tax revenue. While it’s of crucial concern as a societal interest, as a benefit to society, it also benefits the economy. When we invest in housing, we can stimulate the economy and also generate more revenue.

The Dalton McGuinty government promised 20,000 affordable units in four years and has only delivered 80% in eight years. Again, this is another broken promise, a promise that was made to the people of Ontario to ensure that this issue would be addressed, and it was sorrowfully not addressed.

Again, broken promises: In the 2003 provincial election, the Liberals promised, "We will get rid of vacancy decontrol, which allows unlimited rent increase on a unit when a tenant leaves. It will be gone." That was a promise in 2003. Here we stand in 2012; this promise has not been fulfilled.

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The promise was convoluted with the notion of regional rent control. What resulted is that this promise, which was made in an election, was never completed. We didn't see it fulfilled.

What do we need in the province? We need a clear, thought-out, long-term plan that actually has some teeth to it, that actually has some funding to it, that actually has a timeline, some targets set so we can actually address this problem. Instead of paying it lip service, instead of making small steps, let's generate a plan that can sweep and revolutionize the housing issue and that can really take care of our community, that can really address the concerns of those who need this addressed.

To make this plan effective, to make this long-term strategy to address the housing crisis, to address affordable housing to make it more effective, some of the things we need to do are to recognize that there is a significant gap between household incomes and market rents. There are those whose income levels are simply so far lower, beyond what the market rent rates are set at, that they are simply not in a position to afford housing. That's a reality. In order to make a long-term strategy that is effective, we need to recognize that that is a position that many families are in, where their income levels are simply so far imbalanced when compared to the market rates that are set right now.

One strategy that could address this problem is that a housing allowance or a benefit program, particularly for low-income households, would help offset this imbalance. We have people with such low income levels, and market rates are so high, that if there was a specific targeted housing benefit, it would address that gap. It would allow some equity to flow for those people who are in those dire straits. A progressive long-term affordable housing strategy must also ensure an end to vacancy decontrol to ensure that rent levels are kept at something that's actually truly affordable.

The NDP has taken considerable steps to raise this issue, first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, and also to encourage some real change, moving forward—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member has the floor. I apologize.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated, the NDP has taken steps to address some of these issues and has proposed some real solutions. So I'd like to talk about some of the issues that were raised by both my colleague from Welland and as well our colleague from Parkdale-High Park.

In September 2010, Cheri DiNovo introduced a private member's bill to strengthen some of the issues surrounding tenant protection and to highlight some of the concerns that were raised, I'm sure, in her riding, but

issues that affect people across Ontario. Some of the issues included strengthening rent control. One of those was to address this issue of rising rent rates by closing the loophole which currently allows landlords to impose uncontrolled rent increases on tenants renting vacant units by ensuring that rent regulation applies to all rental units, whether vacant or occupied. This is a meaningful way of addressing the issue that the Liberals have promised to correct but had never been addressed. This is a direct approach to solve that problem.

Another suggestion which was made was to ensure rent control applies to all private market rental units, regardless of date of construction, by eliminating the exemption from rent regulation for newer buildings.

Again, what we need to take in terms of affordable housing is a holistic but practical and direct approach to really address the issue. Again, while it's often said the opposition will criticize bills, this bill presents an opportunity to engage in the discussion. We can talk about housing; we can talk about affordable housing. It opens the doors, but we must recognize that it's a small step, that simply addressing the rent increase alone is a small drop in the bucket, so to say. It's only a step where there is a huge vacuum left unaddressed. There is a myriad of other problems which are not being addressed, Mr. Speaker, and which should be addressed, which should be raised.

Some of those issues include individuals who are living in very deplorable conditions. There are slumlord landlords who have units which are improperly maintained. They charge high rents, and they prey on those who are, again, most vulnerable. This is not a minor circumstance. This is the lives of people in Ontario, people who are living in deplorable conditions, who are living in unsanitary, unsafe conditions. This is a real situation that is affecting people in Ontario, that's affecting their ability to live.

Interjection: It's affecting their health.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: In fact, it's directly tied into their health. When we talk about the rising cost of health care, this is an area where we can see that health care also should not be viewed in a vacuum. If we recognize that health care costs are rising, we must also recognize that there are a myriad of factors that influence your health. One of them is where you live. If you live in an environment which is healthy, which is sanitary, you will be healthier. If we want to reduce the level of money we are spending in hospitals, we can promote health. We can also ensure that our citizens, our community, live in healthier places. This would be a long-term and holistic, wide solution to a problem that has been addressed in a more narrow way.

Let's put more funding directly into health care, which we must. But we also have to look at other issues involving your health, such as where you live.

The government has a responsibility for cracking down on those landlords who delay repairs, on those landlords who treat tenants unfairly, who don't maintain their homes or their rental units at a minimum standard of

safety and of health. I think it's without hyperbole that I can state that the government has failed those individuals living in those conditions, and the government must own up to its obligation to ensure that there is proper oversight of those tenants who are living in those conditions.

What the NDP has proposed and what we need to do is increase the amount or the number of affordable units in Ontario. Tens of thousands of Ontarians are stuck in rundown and unaffordable apartments because they are waiting for years for affordable housing. Something we have proposed before and would be a true step in the right direction is building—something the NDP has proposed is to build over 50,000 affordable housing units over the next 10 years. That would address some of the concerns, and it would be a step—a true step—in the right direction, a leap in the right direction. That's the direction we need to be headed if we want to ensure that people in Ontario are taken care of, if we want to really address the issue that housing is a human right. It's something that should be valued at that level, and it should be given the proper respect that it deserves.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad of the comments made by my friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, good comments. I'm happy to make a few of my points that I picked up during your talk.

Affordable housing: There is a crisis out there, and you don't have to stick to urban Ontario; go right to rural Ontario. I'll tell you right now that in quite a bit of my riding, there are huge wait-lists, and there's nothing there for these people except to wait to get in some sort of housing.

I do note that housing funding is the first thing that's usually hit when there are cuts going by. I make reference to the city of London, which was trying to balance their budget last year, which they did, but affordable housing funding was right on the top of their chopping block. I think the government's role is to not blame the city for going after that. They're trying to balance it. I think the government should start working with cities to give them more funds. We, on our PC side, have made this mention numerous times. Let's fix the arbitration system, because that's bankrupting all our rural communities, including urban cities like London.

1650

Another point that I have picked up on is that the government continually says that they're uploading the costs of the public health unit in London-Middlesex when in fact they still are falling behind in picking up their share. I would hope that the Minister of Health would be looking at the funding that they're doing for the London-Middlesex public health unit and in fact come up with the money that they aren't supplying.

We also need to look at costs to tenants and landlords, trying to keep them down. Our party has put forward—and we passed through second reading—removing the HST from our heating bills. We're hoping that the government calls that to committee soon and we can get

it out here and get it passed before the next winter comes along.

We also have to look at partnerships for affordable housing. The private sector is there to give us some answers. We've been waiting and waiting for the government to do something, and we've been waiting in Elgin county for a long time for a hospital rebuild. The government's promise from the last election was broken, and they decided to change their mind—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments? The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: While I was listening to my colleague here doing his rotation, I had a chance to look at the addendum to the Ontario budget. There are a lot of cuts proposed in this budget for the—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: You're in the wrong seat, Cindy.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Sorry.

There are a lot of cuts proposed here for the Ministry of Community and Social Services: almost \$18 million for support services across programs. On page 7, Municipal Affairs and Housing: an \$11-million cut. Here we are talking today about the need for affordable housing and how there's no money, but we have a budget that's actually cutting another \$11 million out of the pie.

Then on page 11, "Reform the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit ... and Home Repairs": a \$162.5-million cut over three years. These are people who often need assistance. They may be newcomers to our communities.

On page 17, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing: another \$100,000 cut around enforcement standards. I think I talked about that during my hour lead-in: how municipalities cannot afford these costs; they don't have the staff to actually do the enforcement. Yet we're cutting another \$100,000 out of the budget.

Then, on aboriginal affairs, there's probably about \$3.5 million being cut from people who live in the worst poverty of anyone who lives in our country.

I think the government needs to turn their mind to having a look at that budget as it impacts—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: In answer to the comments, which I have paid some attention to while I was doing some other business on the phone, I can appreciate the sentiments, Speaker. As a new member, I know that he's speaking on behalf of the people that he represents: the tenants in his community and of course the needs of tenants.

I have to remind not only the member but all the colleagues in the House that tenancy doesn't have any borders. We have tenants in metropolitan Toronto; we have them up in the north; we have them in the east, the west and all over the place. The needs: They're all the same.

I think we have to look at the reality, especially at this particular economic time, when, of course, we always

talk about job protection and security, and this is what people would like to hear from their elected representatives. I said “this particular economic time” because I think the bill addresses this very particular and unsettling economic time in our area. What’s the best thing we can do for our tenants? It’s to let them know and give them that protection, that peace of mind that they are looking for, so they know now that they have a four-year span during which they know what their rent increases are going to be. It may not necessarily be so, because if they are less than 2.5%, that may be negotiated with the landlord. But at least it will not go down to less than 1% or more than 2.5%.

I think this bill gives our tenants, indeed, the peace of mind that they are looking for so they can do other planning for their families—grow their families, their kids—recreation events and stuff like that, and grow their families in a very peaceful atmosphere.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to say I enjoyed listening to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton today on his thoughts on G19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act. As he said, this is a very small step towards the big problem of affordability, and there needs to be a lot more work done when it comes to affordability in this province and affordable housing.

As I was listening to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, I got an email on my BlackBerry, and it was from the Argyle seniors’ group in my riding of London–Fanshawe. I met with them about two weeks ago, and one of the things that the seniors talked about was affordable housing. They wanted to know when this government is going to help seniors and build more affordable housing. Then, today, the text came in that she’s having a meeting with a gentleman in the affordable housing industry, to come and talk to seniors. So this is something that’s really on people’s minds.

Some of the most vulnerable people in our society are seniors. They’re on fixed incomes, and if they’re spending 30% to 40% to 50% on rental income, imagine what’s left for them to purchase food, drive a car and buy their prescriptions. We know that times are really tight, and when seniors have to worry about spending the rest of their income on whether they’re going to eat or be able to afford that prescription, it’s a really sad commentary on what we’re going through today in this economy. Affordable housing has to be a key issue that we keep in the forefront so that people can live with peace of mind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments.

I return to the member for Bramalea–Malton—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Gore–Malton. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the members who joined in the debate.

While I was listening to the comments of the members, I thought of another issue that hasn’t been raised. I’d like to address this issue that affects, I’m sure, many ridings across Ontario but is a particular concern in my

riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton, and actually in Peel region in general. That is that if we don’t have a long-term strategy for housing or for affordable housing, if we don’t have the actual infrastructure in terms of units where people can move into—and there are long waiting lists for people—then the alternative that many people are turning to is basement apartments. In homes where houses have the space for it, many community residents are relying on the ability to rent a basement apartment. It’s an informal way of addressing the problem. It’s not a solution, but it’s an option.

My concern is that while the provincial government has imposed, or has legislated, a bill that requires municipalities to address this by forming a policy, this bill doesn’t require that basement apartments be legal. It’s an issue that affects many people—the landlord, who often uses the renting of a basement as a means of some additional income, supplementing their income. It also is a real option for students, for new Canadians. For families who are initially struggling and don’t have sufficient resources to buy a home, it’s a viable option.

We must ensure that there is a policy that makes these apartments legal, that addresses the fact that there are no other options in many communities. There are no housing units available, and a basement apartment is a real option for both the landlord and the tenant. It should be addressed; it should become an issue that gets the attention it deserves.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: It’s my pleasure to speak to this bill. It’s introduced by, of course, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I have the privilege of serving as the minister’s parliamentary assistant in that regard.

I think, first, what I’d like to do is put on the record for Hansard exactly what the relevant section of this legislation, Bill 19, says and what it does, because it’s a very simple bill.

Bill 19 has three sections, but the guts of the matter are contained in subsection 1(2), and I’m just going to put into Hansard what subsection 1(2) actually says, and then I want to talk about what the effect of it is and why we’ve done what we have done.

Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Sorry. For the listeners, there was just a disturbance in front of me which distracted my thoughts. I thank the disturbers for reining in their enthusiasm for the remarks which I’m about to deliver.

Anyway, here’s what the section says: “The minister shall determine the guideline in effect for each calendar year as follows....” As you know, we had a system in the past which set the rental guidelines as a function of what the inflation numbers are from the federal government. In past years—in fact, just last year, that rate was as low as 0.7%, which of course was very favourable to—as it should be—the tenants. This year, for reasons having to do with the national economy and the international economy, that inflation index jumped up to 3.1%. So we have a situation where people living in rental accom-

modations who are managing their family dollars and managing their budgets very, very carefully had calculated—last year, they were paying 0.7%, and suddenly, overnight, their rent would have jumped 3.1%. That's a significant amount of money for families. Of course, that money has to be found somewhere in the family budget. Put yourself in a situation where you have seniors on very modest incomes or young families on modest incomes and all the expenses entailed in raising children, and suddenly they've got to find another 3% in that family budget to cover the rent increase that year. And that's 3% after taxes. That's 3% of your disposable income.

As I say, that rate took that jump. Nobody expected the inflation rate to take that jump, but there was a host of factors having to do with the international economy and oil prices, what was going on in Europe, what was going on in the United States, what was going on in the rest of Canada, that triggered that enormous jump. So our government decided that we had to bring some measure of greater predictability and greater fairness—and I say “greater predictability and greater fairness”—to even out the bumps so that we didn't have this situation as we've had in the past year or so where we went from, as I've said, 0.7% to 3.1%.

How have we done that? We've done that by amending the Residential Tenancies Act of 2006, and we've put in this section. This is the functioning section of Bill 19, and really it is going to determine how rental increases are calculated for the year. What the section actually says is that the minister—that's the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—will determine the guideline in effect for each calendar year. So every year, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will sit down and determine what that guideline is, what will be the permissible rent increase for the ensuing year. It moves it away from just a direct reaction to the inflation index, because that's an arbitrary number—as I said, last year it was 0.7%, and it jumped to 3.1%. So the minister is going to have the discretion to set the rent increase guidelines.

Now, it's not a complete discretion, because there are some parameters attached to that discretion, and here's what those parameters are. This is the heart of the legislation. This is how the actual dollar amount will be calculated on a rent increase. The section goes on to say that this is how the guideline will be set each year: “Subject to the limitations set out in paragraph 2, the guideline for a calendar year is the percentage change from year to year in the consumer price index for Ontario for prices of goods and services as reported monthly by Statistics Canada, averaged over the 12-month period...,” and that calculation is done in May of the previous year.

What it says is that the rent increase will be, as it has been in past years, a direct function of the inflation index that's maintained by the federal government. So we calculate that as a percentage and we know what that is, and then the minister can step in and adjust that calculation based on the consumer price index.

Now, how does the minister go about that calculation of adjusting what would otherwise be just a straight relationship to the inflation index? Well, the minister will apply this guideline: “The guideline for a calendar year shall be not less than 1% and not more than 2.5%.” So if the consumer price index, the inflation information that comes out of the federal government once a year—I'll give you an example. Let's say that it's 2% based on the inflation calculation; well, that would be the rent increase. Now, if that inflation index, let's say, is 3% or 4%, that won't be the rent increase because there will be a cap on the rent increase, and that cap is 2.5%. If the inflation index was, let's say, 0.3%, similarly the rent increase would not drop below 1%.

So we have a situation here where we're mindful of the needs of landlords for a reasonable minimum increase, and that would be 1%. We also have in mind the needs of the tenants, and for the tenants the maximum increase would be 2.5%. If the inflation index was somewhere between 1% and 2.5%, that would be the rent increase.

So there are really three numbers here that you have to keep in mind. I want to make this clear for the benefit of the viewing audience, because I've been getting a lot of questions in Willowdale, both from landlords and from tenants. They've been following the bill and they've been asking me, “But how does the calculation actually work? What does it mean?” Simply, to repeat for the benefit of everybody watching and for the benefit of Hansard, the rent increase will be one of three numbers. It will be whatever the inflation index is, published by the federal government, as long as that inflation index is somewhere between 1% and 2.5%. If it's below 1%, the landlord is covered because the landlord will get a minimum of 1%. If it's more than 2.5%, it's capped at that, and that protects the tenant. So now we have predictability. We know for sure that rent increases are going to be within those very, very narrow parameters.

1710

I say, and our government says, that that is fair for tenants and fair for landlords. And when you sit back and look at the kinds of numbers that are involved—1%, 2.5%—that also is reasonable. It's reasonable for all the parties concerned. So that's the mechanics of it.

I want to say a word about how the minister—because I've been asked this question: “When the minister is doing her calculation, assuming that the federal inflation index is somewhere between 1% and 2.5%, the minister has the discretion to set the guideline somewhere in there. How will the minister go about that?” Well, I expect the minister—this is how we got to this stage in the first place—will consult. The minister will consult with landlords and the minister will consult with tenants—individual tenants, individual landlords—to get their idea of what the market conditions are like, both in Toronto and in other parts of Ontario—small-town Ontario, rural Ontario, big-city Ontario. I expect that the minister will consult with tenant umbrella organizations and consult with landlord umbrella organizations. I

expect that the minister will consult with her colleagues here in this chamber and consult with the ministry. And the minister, on a good-faith basis and with a real sense of how the economy is working—what the needs of the tenants are and what the needs of the landlords are—will make that determination.

I speak to this issue because I personally have a great interest in landlord and tenant matters. Before I was elected to this chamber in 2003, I served for three years as the first chair of the Toronto Community Housing Corp. When I was there, we had about 1,500 high-rises and another collection of stand-alone single-family dwellings. In those 1,500 high-rises, we had 62,000 individual units, and in those 62,000 individual units we housed 164,000 tenants. When the Toronto Community Housing Corp. was set up, depending on which entities you look at, it was either the third- or fourth-largest housing authority in North America, after New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. I remember attending our board meetings at the Toronto Community Housing Corp. as chair with our public servants, and it was always a struggle to set a fair rent, particularly with the inhabitants and residents of the Toronto Community Housing Corp.

The thing we found that tenants needed—and it's the same for tenants who are paying market rates in the private sector—is predictability and reasonableness. For most people managing their family budgets, it's very, very difficult to handle from one year to the next, going, as we did in this past year, from less than 1% to more than 3%. If the inflation rate had been 4%, 5% or 6%—imagine waking up one morning and the consumer inflation rate is published and it's 6% or 5% or 7% and suddenly you've got to take that hit in your family budget. What this legislation is designed to do is even that out, as I've said, so that tenants have predictability and reasonableness.

Now, we've consulted, in the process of drafting Bill 19, widely with both tenant and landlord organizations. We've consulted with municipal authorities and municipal politicians who understand the local realities in their communities, whether it's in rural Ontario or small-town Ontario or big-city Ontario, and we've got a sense from those consultations—we've got more than a sense from those consultations—that this regime that we're designing in Bill 19 is, in fact, what's required to even out that possibility of the inflation rate taking a big jump one year and hammering everybody's budget.

I read the business sections in all of the newspapers and some of the principal American newspapers and some of the English newspapers. One of the things that economists, politicians, builders, landlords, tenants, residents are very, very worried about—you're hearing a tremendous amount about this as people are trying to read the tea leaves, trying to fathom what's going to happen in our uncertain economy. When you read the financial press, the theme seems to be this: Nobody is sure whether or how fast our economy is going to recover. There is one theme or one scenario that paints us, over the next

number of years, as having something close to almost a zero inflation rate. There's another scenario that's predicated on increases in oil prices, increases in agricultural products and food stuffs and so on, that says, "No, what people should expect in the next couple of years is a significant jump in the rate of inflation." So under the old regime, tenants are getting up every morning wondering which of those scenarios is going to play out, the sort of zero or 1% or 2% inflation rate or a big jump?

Just look at what has happened to gas prices in the last couple of weeks. I filled up the car yesterday, and I see that the high-test gas was \$1.51, and I think the low-test gas was \$1.36. In the US, gas prices—every night I watch the American news at 6:30 and so on, and I see the big issue down there is the huge jump in gas prices. Now they're worried about the inflation rate that might take a great jump.

The beauty of this legislation is that tenants and, indeed, landlords now know that, regardless of which of those scenarios plays out in our economy—the flat, static inflation rate or the big jump in the inflation rate—everybody, landlords and tenants, is going to be protected. The landlords will get at least 1%. The tenants know that they're never going to have to pay more than 2.5%. Then within that range, the minister will set the guidelines for the rent increase.

I come back to my initial comments that, in these uncertain and troubling economic times, people are worried: "If there's a big jump in the inflation rate, am I going to have enough after-tax income to handle that rent increase and pay for my kids' clothes and pay for my other bills and pay for the high gas prices that I need to get to my job?" That's what this legislation is designed to do: fairness and predictability.

I can tell you that the groups that I've talked to, both on the landlord side and on the tenant side, understand that. They appreciate that. Some have been in to see me at my office and have said, "Mr. Zimmer, I know it's difficult for the government in these trying economic times, but you have brought some fairness and predictability. We appreciate your government's efforts in that regard."

So again, I'm very pleased to stand and speak in favour of this legislation. I would never want to see the day when someone has to worry that next month, when the consumer inflation rate comes out, that it's going to be high and suddenly, overnight, "I've got to come up with a significant chunk of extra money for my rent." Thank you, Speaker.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Health on a point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much, Speaker. On February 19, I responded to a question from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The Hansard of the response I provided states, "I can't give the member opposite the assurance that all current residents will be moved to a long-term-care home of their choice"—what I said, Speaker, but what I would like to

correct the record to say is, “I can give the member opposite” assurances. So, an enunciation problem on my part, Speaker; an important difference. It should read, “I can give the member opposite....” Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments? The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rental affordability is an important aspect of living in this province, and we must look at both sides with a balanced approach, and it needs to look after the number of units, so that there's no question we want to ensure that the rental rates are kept responsible and reasonable.

We also have to look that the return be such that it encourages new units in the rental market, or we run into some of the problems we've had over the past number of years where there aren't enough rental units. I've heard members on this side of the House talking about the need for more social housing. Part of that is because there's no return for landlords. It's interesting to see the concern with this government over the rent increases when there was very little concern over the other costs that these people are paying.

You know, we look at the cost of energy and what that's done to living in this province. We've seen energy rates spike up 83% since 2003, and 150% if you're lucky enough to have a smart meter. Under the McGuinty government, we look at seeing this increase another 45% over the next five years.

So, while it's important to look at these costs, there are many costs that make life affordable in this province—I would like to think that we should look at them all and that's our role in this government, as well as making sure that we have enough rental units. To say that it's a balanced approach—I think this bill still fails there. We can restrict rents, but if they have no place to live, what have we done? We're only going to force these landlords to sell the units because they're unaffordable to maintain, and of course, that's a way around the rent increase. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's interesting that the member who spoke before me talks about there being no returns for landlords, because the information that I kind of got when I did my research was that this 2012 guideline increase came along at a time when the province's renter households have an annual income that on average is half of what the owners of those buildings are. So, when we talk about balance, the renters have had stagnant incomes since 2009, with the recession. I heard the minister talk about balance as well in her lead-in. She talked about the balance for landlords and how it would be unfair to make this bill retroactive because landlords already have their plan in place. However, there's no balance on the other side for people who are stuck at the same minimum wage, who are having their ODSP and Ontario Works frozen, who are only getting half of their child tax benefit. Those parents of those children were counting on

getting \$200 a year more this year. Now they're finding out that they're only getting \$100. What about their plans for the 2012 year, for their expenses?

The other issue that could immediately make a change would be to ensure that those other 50,000 to 60,000 units come under the guidelines and that the ones that have been lost, as tenants leave, come back under the guidelines. I think that would go a long way—the numbers that I've been given by some of the groups—that would bring another 300,000 units across the province under the guidelines.

I would suggest that the government go back and look at those issues and come forward with some bills to assist Ontarians.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: It was a delight to listen to my colleague from Willowdale, who, in his remarks today, certainly demonstrated in this House very clearly that he's very knowledgeable about the housing rental market here in Ontario, but particularly right here in Toronto.

It's interesting. The parliamentary assistant gave me some facts here that are very, very interesting. I did not know that there are 1,312,290 tenant households in the province of Ontario, representing 29% of all the households in Ontario. This includes private rentals, social housing and transitional housing. The number of tenant households affected by the annual rent increase guideline would be approximately one million. Those are very interesting numbers.

When you look over the years since rent control legislation was introduced by the Davis government in 1975—in 1975, the guideline was 8% for a rental increase. That's substantial. In the early 1990s, it was 5.4%; 1991, 6%. It's interesting enough that since 2003—in 2003, it was 2.9%; 2004, 2.9%; 2005, 1.5%; 2006, 2.1%; 2007, 2.6%; 2008, 1.4%; 2009, 1.4%; 2010, 2.11%. It's interesting how it's varied significantly over the last 37 years, after it was originally introduced by the Davis government in 1975.

I also want to remind those individuals who are watching the debate this evening—I know they're all glued to their TV, just enjoying their dinner; it's about 5:30 p.m.—that the legislation does allow—

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I too found it interesting to hear my colleague and share his thoughts with regard to this bill. He talked about predictability and reasonableness in uncertain times. He talked a little bit about never wanting to have to worry about the unpredictability of inflation. I would add to that comment interest rates that could spike at any time and really put us in a dire spot.

I would be remiss—and it kind of drew me a parallel to: What if the Liberal government had adopted a similar concern and a similar approach to their spending habit over the last eight years, and a ceiling that would limit it? Then we would not be in the dire situation and the consequences of where we are today.

Conversely, we would have had reasonable rents. We would have had a reasonable supply of affordable housing. We would have an economy that is creating jobs, not losing them. We would have a debt that is manageable and not one that is actually mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren.

Speaker, just think. What could have been accomplished with the \$3 billion wasted by the Liberals on their cancelled Mississauga and Oakville gas plants and the billion-dollar boondoggle? We would have houses for those in need, jobs for the construction trades, hospitals built as opposed to cancelling them and breaking election promises.

Just think what we could do if we did not have to spend \$10 billion just to service our debt load. What happens if that interest rate spikes and it's \$20 billion? Think about the people who can't afford what they need out there today.

My colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, I think, brings a valid point. We need balance. We need to always be thinking about what our actions do and how we can work together to help those less fortunate. We need to always put restraint on our spending and not mortgage our future and live beyond our means. We need to look at things like Bill 19 and make sure there's a balance between those private industries that are trying to make a living and those people who need affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I now return to the member for Willowdale—

Interjections.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Two minutes to reply.

1730

Mr. David Zimmer: All right. Well, thank you very much. I wanted to just take the two minutes to speak about the impact of this on landlords because, of course, we have to be mindful of our landlords. They're the ones who build the buildings and supply the units.

Our proposed legislation on the guideline—of course I've said that—will introduce greater stability for the landlords. We recognize the valuable contribution landlords make to the rental housing market. That's why—you want to keep this in mind—landlords can continue to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for above-guideline rent increases for the following purposes: extraordinary increases in the cost of municipal taxes and charges in utilities and the like, eligible capital expenditures, and increases in operating costs related to security services.

The Residential Tenancies Act also contains several provisions to promote a healthy investment climate for rental housing. With regard to market rent, when the units are vacant, landlords may negotiate rents with new tenants. Rental units built or first occupied after November 1991 are exempt from the annual rent increase guideline. This is an important one: The interest rate that a landlord must pay on the last month's rent has been lowered from 6% and is now the same as the rent increase guideline, which of course will be based on Ontario's CPI.

Again, coming back to this idea of what our government has tried to do is to strike the right balance, to bring a degree of fairness that is respectful and protective of the rights and the difficulties of tenants paying their rent while, at the same time, preserving the system for our landlords.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Health on a point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I apologize, but I need to correct my correction. The correct date was the 29th of February. I did say "the 19th."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you for that clarification.

Further debate? The member for Lambton–Kent—

Mr. Robert Bailey: Sarnia–Lambton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sarnia–Lambton. Sorry.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I was just testing you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the kind introduction. I was just testing you there to see if you knew the riding; excellent.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak to the House today about Bill 19 and the emerging needs of tenants and landlords in Ontario. We know that when it comes to housing in the province of Ontario, whether you come at the issue from the perspective of a landlord, a tenant or a service provider in the municipal sector, the situation is far from perfect. All sides of this issue face serious challenges. Unfortunately, this bill doesn't address the very serious issues that both landlords and tenants are facing across the province.

Ontario, right now, has about 1,300,000 tenant households. Twenty per cent of tenant households spend more than 50% of their income on rent. I believe the general rule of budgeting says that that number should be closer to 30%. So, right now, we know that there are a number of people across this province that are struggling to make ends meet.

Thirty-two per cent of tenants have accommodations that fail to meet standards of adequacy, suitability and affordability. These numbers are up and will continue to rise across this province as this province fails to deal with economic stagnation; the loss of the industrial sector—over 600,000 Ontario men and women out of work; skyrocketing energy prices; significant increases to user fees, like those included in last week's budget; and increased taxes to pay for this government's overspending and mismanagement, yet this bill, Bill 19, does nothing to deal with those core issues that are making life so unaffordable in Ontario.

My riding of Sarnia–Lambton is not immune to those issues, like the lack of job creation. Right now, the unemployment rate in Sarnia–Lambton, according to the workforce development board, is sitting at 11.1% in my riding. People can't afford the cost of living because they are struggling to find those basic work opportunities.

Things will continue to get worse under this government. In the last year alone in my riding, we have lost over 100 direct jobs at Lambton generating station, 80 at the Sarnia jail and over 260 at Hiawatha Horse Park

because of the ill-informed and misdirected decisions of this government.

In addition, on March 30, NCO Customer Management Ltd. shut its doors in Sarnia, leaving another 500 people out-of-work in my riding. We still don't know what the final job loss numbers in Sarnia-Lambton will be once the revenue-generating slots-at-racetracks program is finally scrapped—another misdirection by this government.

I'd like to point out an article by Jim Coyle that appeared in the Toronto Star on Saturday. It describes what will likely happen in rural communities like mine across this province with a stake in the horse racing industry, such as Sarnia-Lambton. Mr. Coyle wrote, "In the paddock at Mohawk," and in Sarnia-Lambton, "veterinarians, owners, breeders, trainers, drivers, grooms—all engaged in the palpable labour of love that is the horse industry—say the province doesn't seem to have a clue how far its decision will ripple through the economy.

"I can't think of anything in the rural areas that it won't have an effect on," says Bill O'Donnell of the Ontario Horse Racing Industry Association.

"The chain-reaction goes something like this:

"Without the purse money supported by the slot-in-racetracks program, it will become economically unfeasible to breed, raise and train horses to race.

"And the loss, in a business that supports about 60,000 jobs, ripples out in ways paddock denizens don't think the government has recognized.

"It will hit vehicle manufacturers whose trucks and trailers fill the Mohawk" and Hiawatha and many other tracks. "It will hit feed dealers and the farmers who make ends meet selling hay and straw to horse owners. It will hit small-town tack shops, blacksmiths and hardware stores. It will hit barn builders and even the rubber manufacturer who provides the large mats that cushion the floors of stalls....

"Dr. John Hennessey has a farm ... and a mobile veterinary practice. He travels with a \$100,000"—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Yes, I thought we were debating a bill on housing. I haven't heard anything about housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you to the member for Guelph. We are indeed debating a housing bill, Bill 19. I will return to the member for Sarnia-Lambton and ask him to confine his remarks to the bill at hand.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's such a thin bill, Mr. Speaker. There's such thin gruel in this bill, I couldn't even find anything to talk about. But the point I'm trying to make is that there's a lot of people in this province who are going to be out of income and won't be able to pay their rent. This government should have taken that into account before they made that misinformed, ill-informed malfeasance on this job with this cancelling the slots at racetracks.

But anyway, I'll get back to this bill. This is an excellent example of significant impacts that the misguided agenda of this government is having on rural communities in Ontario. Because of that agenda, we'll continue to raise the cost of living in Ontario.

In Sarnia-Lambton, as well as many other communities like Guelph and other communities across this province, we are dealing with some pretty alarming numbers. According to the latest statistics provided by the United Way, in my riding there are over 500 families on the waiting list for affordable housing in my community. I hope this will satisfy the government members that we're talking about the bill. It was getting there. Sometimes it takes a little longer.

In 2009, the United Way of Sarnia-Lambton reports that over 700 families in Sarnia-Lambton required additional assistance from a program that in my riding is known as the rent bank, in order to meet their monthly housing expenses. In the same year, 266 people, including children, were housed in emergency shelters in Sarnia-Lambton because they did not have the means or access to affordable housing in their community.

It should also be noted that the rent bank program in Sarnia-Lambton only has the capacity to help an individual or a family once every 24 months. That means that in addition to the 700 families that received assistance, there are hundreds that are not eligible each year.

These numbers are shocking, but just a small example of what is going on in many communities across Ontario. That's why I'm wondering about the need for Bill 19 at this time. It isn't going to do anything to help those people in Sarnia-Lambton to get that safe, secure, affordable place to raise their family. Facing the mounting demand for geared-to-income housing in my community, local leaders in this community are taking the kind of actions that Bill 19 could have included, but are nowhere to be found in the bill.

I want to read an excerpt from a recent article by Paul Morden of the Sarnia Observer, if the government members will allow me, describing what our local leaders in Sarnia-Lambton are doing to address the dramatic need for new housing solutions in our community, something that the government members could take back to the cabinet table:

"Lambton county could begin taking applications in February for the 57-apartment affordable housing building under construction on Maxwell Street.

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"A standing committee of county council is recommending it adopt a Lambton housing services department plan to fill the 50 seniors apartments, and seven for the disabled." This \$10-million project is "located on the former Marshall Gowland Manor site.

"The contractor expects to have the building finished in August, said Lola Dudley, the county's housing services manager.

"We're hoping by the end of October to have it fully rented."

“The plan, going to county council February 2, would set rents, including hydro, at \$530 for one-bedroom apartments and \$629 for two bedrooms.

“The committee also backed a call to use an existing county subsidy program to ensure none of the building’s tenants spend more than 30% of their income on rent.

“A report from housing services notes” over “100 households are already on a mailing list of people interested in becoming tenants.

“But the plan would initially target 16 of the seniors units at current tenants of county rent-geared-to-income apartments.

““That would free up those units for non-seniors who have been on the list for some time’....”

Unfortunately Bill 19 does nothing to create affordable housing in situations like Sarnia–Lambton’s. It does nothing to assist local municipalities in coping with the mounting costs of operating their existing stock of affordable housing.

The mayor of Sarnia, Mayor Mike Bradley, one that I’m sure the government knows well, has commented that the condition of the more than 1,100 rent-geared-to-income units the county owns in Sarnia–Lambton is troubling. Many buildings are plagued by ongoing maintenance issues. It’s estimated that across Ontario there is a \$3-billion repair backlog because this government has failed for nine years and hasn’t made those needed investments.

Mr. Speaker, landlords are facing huge expenses to maintain or bring the vast number of rental units that came online during the 1960s and 1970s and have become substandard or even dangerous to live in. Some of the other members spoke earlier about that. Bill 19 will not assist in any of that. Bill 19 will not assist in opening up any new rental units or encouraging landlords grappling with the crippling effect of the HST and the skyrocketing hydro and heating costs, implemented by this government, to stay in the business of renting out residential units.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, being a landlord is a money-losing position. Costs of operating the units continue to rise up to 6% per year. Despite that, the average rate increase in Ontario was 2.1%, and over the past five the average increase was 1.7%. Over the last five and 10 years, those increases have fallen between the floor and ceiling that is proposed in Bill 19. So what is the point of this bill?

Mr. Speaker, rent increases are already pegged to the Ontario consumer price index, which gives us a broad understanding of the price of common goods and our spending power from year to year. Why the minister would create a bill that meddles with that system is somewhat puzzling and only highlights the limits of this particular act.

But it is not just my caucus colleagues who are questioning the need for Bill 19, Mr. Speaker. Tenant groups in Ontario can see how empty a vessel this bill is as well. My colleague from Leeds–Grenville introduced these comments when he spoke about Bill 19 last week. I think they need repeating.

Kenn Hale from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants said, “Why is the government doing so little to protect the homes of hundreds of thousands of tenants after promising so much more?” He goes on to say, “In the real world, tenants are losing their jobs, facing demands for wage freezes and rollbacks or living with a 1% increase in their social assistance cheques.”

I can update this and say that the Minister of Finance has decided to freeze social assistance rates in his 2012 budget. For example, people collecting disability income must continue to make do with \$12,000 a year, make it stretch to meet the rising price of energy that has been brought in by the ill-thought-out Green Energy Act and smart meters—if I can say that. So there’s no relief for individuals here either, Mr. Speaker.

The last line—“the 300,000 tenant households that live in buildings that are exempt from rent regulation, and we hope the minister amends the bill to provide them” some protection as well

Once again, Mr. Speaker, this bill is lacking substance. It should be noted that Bill 19 provides no protections for rising rents at vacant residential units; residential units first occupied on or after November 1, 1991; social housing units; or nursing homes. From the perspective of a landlord, a tenant or a service provider in the municipal sector, the situation is far from perfect. All sides of this issue face serious problems.

Again, I will repeat some of the comments that were made by the president and CEO of the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario. He said, in reaction to the bill—this is Mr. Brescia—“We understand the government’s efforts to mitigate price volatility, but setting an arbitrary price ceiling fails to recognize that housing industry costs, like repairs and maintenance, are not subject to any price caps.... The government is unilaterally imposing a cap without any discussion with an entire industry and is initiating a policy that will be particularly devastating for small landlords.”

Mr. Speaker, just like when the HST was introduced, the message that this government is sending to landlords, in order to look good to the tenants in the minister’s own riding, is that they need to continue to absorb the increased costs of goods and services in their properties. Covering these extra costs, imposed by this government, further negates any amount of positive cash flow that these rental units might have once generated for these owners. Unfortunately, this government forgets that most of these rental units are owned by average Ontarians who have scraped together a little extra money from their savings to pay for a second property or possibly add an apartment unit to their home. Most of these people are simply operating these rental units with the hope of a modest return on a small investment to help them pay off their mortgage or save for retirement.

The impact of the HST alone being introduced left rental housing providers no choice but to use funds from their reserve funds in order to make up this cost difference. Reserve funds are not intended to cover that sort of expense; it is important that they are used for

unexpected repairs and maintenance that keeps units and buildings in good shape.

According to the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, the HST added an additional 5% charge to landlords and inflation has added 2%, leaving landlords with an additional 7% charge. Unfortunately, under this government these sorts of wild increases, associated with the cost of living, are not uncommon and are having the effect of making owning rental properties less and less desirable.

If rental properties go off-line in our province, there will be dramatic economic and social repercussions across Ontario. One of the key messages I think that comes out of this bill, as our critic implied, is that this bill is one of the results of the HST, which added additional costs to several services that landlords are required to provide, including snow removal, landscaping and many home improvement services and, in many cases, hydro and electrical costs. Our party, the PC Party, repeatedly warned the government of Ontario of the risk of Ontario's rental housing stock deteriorating with the additional cost of the HST, on top of the risk that the small landlords might get out of the business altogether. The McGuinty Liberals ignored these warnings and originally told landlords to "absorb the cost of the HST."

I was at a meeting one day, Mr. Speaker—I followed the Minister of Revenue at that time—and there were real estate brokers, which makes me think about it. I said, "What did the minister say?" They said, "He told us to get ready to absorb the HST in our commission." So they weren't very happy. It made me think of that.

The McGuinty government has left landlords with no other option than to raise rents and has left tenants to pay the additional costs of their HST.

I will not be supporting Bill 19, primarily because this bill will have very little impact—I thought I should make that clear, maybe, before the end of my remarks—

Mr. Jeff Leal: We were worried, Bob.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You knew where I was going, did you?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The member from Peterborough said he knew where I was going.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting Bill 19, primarily because this bill will have very little impact in actually protecting residents from rising rents and the increasingly unaffordable environment that has been created by this government in Ontario.

The Progressive Conservative caucus, led by Tim Hudak, has repeatedly warned the government of the risk of Ontario's rental housing stock deteriorating with the additional costs of the HST, on top of the risk that the small landlords might get out of the business altogether. The impact of energy increases, all of these costs that landlords have tried to absorb—tenants are being wedged in the middle there.

This act is more about the minister appearing to be on the side of the tenants in her riding in order to try to gain some type of support. There are clearly more substantive

changes to the Residential Tenancies Act that could have been made to truly improve the situation in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton and across all of the ridings in the southwest and across Ontario as a whole, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you for the time in the Legislature today.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to follow the member for Sarnia–Lambton. I've heard a couple of times this evening, throughout the context of this debate, the three little letters: HST. I've heard it mainly from this side of the House. It really always makes my ears perk up, Mr. Speaker, because I tend to wonder at the battle, the inner struggle with your conscience, those members across the way have when we talk about the HST as a measure in this province and as it was imposed. We know that their parliamentary cousins were the ones that actually imposed it upon this province, in cahoots, as a technical term, with the government of the day.

It's one that New Democrats—and I'll raise the point again, as I did in my earlier statement—sounded the alarm on every street corner, at every turn, about how it was going to affect people. Here we are today talking about how it will affect landlords and tenants and how it has affected landlords and tenants.

I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, proudly announcing and indicating to this House that New Democrats are prepared to alleviate that burden and have introduced measures to take the harmonized sales tax that was imposed by the federal government, in coordination with the provincial government, off of not only home heating costs but eventually hydro rates once the 10% break that the province quickly enacted to cover their trail is removed. We understand that that will give people the affordability that they need, and it's something that I hope this House adopts at some point in the future.

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by thanking all of the speakers today who have been speaking to this very important bill.

Speaker, I believe that actions speak louder than words. I've been hearing the members opposite talk and criticize this bill, so I just wanted to take a few minutes to take a look at their record as to what they did when it came to affordable housing.

I'll start with the PCs because it's much easier. If you were to look at the eight years that they were governing, you would be hard-pressed to find them use the words "affordable housing" even once during the Legislature. That is their record on affordable housing: They never even uttered those words for eight years.

As for the NDP, one might think that the NDP might have been more sympathetic to the cause of making housing more affordable, so I looked at their record. It turns out that in 1992, rents went up by 6%, while inflation was only 1%. In 1993, rents went up by 4.9%

under the NDP, and inflation was 1.8%. In 1994, rents went up by 3.2%, and inflation was 0%, Speaker. That is their record.

As a Liberal, I stand here very, very proud of our record when it comes to affordable housing. We've done a lot, and this bill is a great, great step in the right direction by limiting the maximum that the landlord can charge a tenant at a 2.5% rent increase. Not only that, we've done a lot to increase the stock of affordable housing. There is always more stock to be built; I will not disagree with that.

But one thing that we've done which is very practical and doesn't cost the taxpayer anything is that the province has amended the Planning Act to require that municipalities authorize in their official plans and zoning bylaws to make it legal for second units or basement apartments. There's no better way to increase the stock of affordable legal housing than this

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's interesting to hear the members opposite talk about affordability. It seems to me something the honourable member from Bruce-Grey talked about. It comes to balance. If you're truly interested in the cost of living in this province, you have to look at all aspects. We talked about hydro, we talked about the HST. These are things they brought in that made huge increases, much more than any of these rent increases. We have people who now can't find a place to live in this province because we've driven up costs for landlords. It's all a balance issue.

It's interesting to note the waste of money we've had in this province. That has been well documented, but I think the other side is not listening sometimes—billions of dollars wasted just in hydro alone and the plants they're building. Seat savers comes up during the election and then they're cancelled. We're seeing lawsuits coming against the government now. These are more losses that the consumer has to pay for. It all adds up.

You have to look at a balanced approach to this. We're looking at affordability right across, whether it be in food supplies—the price of fuel is going up much more than 2.5%. We're looking at people maybe being able to afford the rent but not being able to turn on the lights, not being able to do the laundry, not being able to buy their food.

You have to look at the big picture here, and I think with this province we've failed to see that over the last eight years under the McGuinty government, and we're paying dearly for it now. We're seeing life here—people without housing increasing exponentially. We have to do something soon if we're going to see this problem fixed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to read a direct quote from an article on December 5, 2011, in the news editors, and hopefully I can squeeze it in in the two minutes.

“During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to keep rent increase guidelines ‘in line with what is happening in the real world for those who rent.’

“In the real world, tenants are losing their jobs, facing demands for wage freezes and rollbacks or living with a 1% increase in their social assistance cheques. In the real world, when tenants move there is no limit on the rent increases that a landlord can charge an incoming tenant in any private-market building,” added Hale. “All tenants deserve to be protected from unaffordable rent increases, including 300,000 tenant households that live in buildings that are exempt from rent regulation, and we hope the minister amends the bill to provide them with this protection.”

I just wanted to say that, even though this bill is doing a small part in trying to soften the blow for the affordability that tenants face, there is a lot more to be done. A lot of people are suffering beyond that small gesture of the 1% to 2.5% controlling that inflation on rent.

I personally know someone who was looking in my riding for a unit. She looked around for quite some time and was really disappointed and disgusted with the conditions of a unit that she was going to rent for \$1,000 a month. She said she just couldn't believe the type of rent that you had to pay for the type of unit you were going to be charged for.

So, we still have a lot more to do when it comes to affordability and the conditions of apartment units.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return to the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Did you want me to stick to the bill? Anyway, I'd like to thank the member from Essex, the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—stone, dust and gravel—and the member for London–Fanshawe, obviously, for their remarks, especially the member for London–Fanshawe for bringing up those remarks from during the election campaign. Obviously a lot of things are said then that—you know the old story: When all's said and done, there's a lot more said than done. This bill would probably be a good example of that.

As I said, one of the results of this bill—the HST, the price of energy in this province, all these things have done a great deal to jeopardize many people in being able to afford housing. We always said that one of the biggest problems in this province, the threat to health care and education in this province, is the McGuinty government's overspending. That's what threatened them: large deficits and debt. That's what's going to threaten health and social programs in this province, and affordable housing as well.

Interjection: And the horses.

Mr. Robert Bailey: And the horses—all those 60,000 jobs in this province, right in the backyard of Guelph, for the member from Guelph. The veterinary school—there will be a number of students who probably won't be placed this year. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, all those things

go into making an economy that can afford to pay rent—affordable housing.

We think this bill, like I say, is too little too late. It doesn't go far enough. We in this caucus won't be supporting it, because we think it is more about trying to let the minister herself win some points back home in her riding.

It won't do anything. You've heard from the tenant groups, you've heard from the landlords, you've heard from the opposition. I'm sure the government members

have heard from their voters, their constituents, as well. I'm sure, if they were maybe more forthright with us, that we'd probably know they're not happy either.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

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 1801.

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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milligan, Rob E. (PC) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Soo Wong
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Liz Sandals, Jagmeet Singh
David Zimmer
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Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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