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(Hansard)**

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Monday 7 April 2014

Lundi 7 avril 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 April 2014

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 avril 2014

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to recognize a number of my constituents from the great riding of Oxford, who are here to meet with the Ministry of the Environment this morning.

In the members' gallery is the chairperson of Oxford People Against the Landfill, Steve McSwiggan, and one of the members, Karen Paton Evans; and from the Oxford Coalition for Social Justice, Bryan Smith.

I'm also pleased to introduce the mayor of Ingersoll, Mayor Ted Comiskey; the mayor of Zorra, Margaret Lupton; and the mayor of South-West Oxford, David Mayberry.

I'd like to welcome them all to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to welcome to Queen's Park Christine Albee from the Ontario division of the Canadian Diabetes Association. They are here at Queen's Park for the launch of the diabetes charter. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to introduce and to welcome Mr. Syed Faisal Ahsan, a professor of architecture visiting from Michigan, visiting my riding of Richmond Hill. Please join me in welcoming Professor Ahsan.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It is a great privilege to announce that I have two people visiting from the riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex: Johan Tangelder and Bernard Tangelder. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

As well, I'd like to introduce Kelly Harris from Central 1 Credit Union. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'd like all members of the Legislature to welcome my big sister, Susan, who is here—Susan Houghton and her loving husband, Roy. Welcome to both of them.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to welcome, in the members' gallery, two constituents of mine—and they're also in my riding association—from Chatham-Kent-Essex: Ed O'Brien, a past president, and our current riding president, Jeff Parker. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I, too, want to welcome people from the diabetes association here. We're celebrating the launch of the Diabetes Charter for Canada today. Christine Albee is here, Phil Weintraub, and Kingsley Kwok. Welcome to you all.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I wish to welcome students from St. Patrick Secondary School in my riding, who are coming in just now.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to welcome to the Legislature 80 grades 5, 6 and 7 students of Khalsa School Malton, and their teachers, principal Sarvjit Soni, his wife, Surinder Soni, and photographer, Bashir Nassar. Khalsa School Malton was among the top 10 Ontario schools, based on recent grades 3 and 6 EQAO results. I want to congratulate the school's staff and students for this great achievement, and I welcome them to the Legislature. They will be meeting with the Premier later on in the afternoon.

DEATH OF MINER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent of the House for a moment of silence to mark the passing of a miner in Sudbury who died last night on the job at Copper Cliff mine.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of the third party is seeking unanimous consent to have a moment of silence upon the knowledge of a death of a miner last night in Sudbury. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would have all members and guests please stand for a moment's silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Our condolences to the family and friends.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the member from Kingston and the Islands, in honour of page captain Urooj Ali, mother Naila Ali, father Syed Muhammad Ali, sister Aliya Ali and brother Ahmed Syed Bakhtihar are in the members' gallery, and we welcome them on behalf of the member.

On behalf of the member from Ottawa Centre for captain page Caroline Falkner, grandparents Beth and Michael Martin are here in the public gallery. We welcome them as guests.

Finally, with us today in the Speaker's gallery is a delegation from Migori County Assembly of the Republic of Kenya. This delegation is led by the Honourable Gordon Ogola, Speaker of the Migori County Assembly. Please join me in welcoming warmly our guests from Kenya.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the finance minister. Dalton McGuinty was certainly known for his reckless spending. His finance minister doubled our provincial debt and had record deficits. Your first full year as finance minister was 2013, and the debt actually went up, not down. The deficit was \$2 billion greater under your watch.

I'm going to ask you, Minister: You had more revenue come in. How did you actually do worse than Dalton McGuinty's finance minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question, and I also reference the Leader of the Opposition to his own projections, which, by the way, were even worse than what we did because we did cut spending. We actually—
Interjections.

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: —and were disciplined in our determination in terms of reducing our spending and controlling it, which we do.

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We recognize that revenues are much lower than forecast, and as a result, we take the necessary and appropriate steps to work towards our balance by 2017-18. That's the prudent way.

The member opposite would claim that the best way to do this is to do across-the-board cuts—harm our recovery and ensure that those who are looking for security and opportunity are cut off the system. We're not going to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Of course I make the decisions to balance the budget and send a signal that Ontario is open for job creation again. Isn't that what we're here for?

Again, the 2012 deficit, the last year of the Dalton McGuinty government, was \$9.2 billion. Instead of getting closer to balance, you actually increased the deficit. The Wynne Liberals are actually more reckless in their spending than even Dalton McGuinty was. I recognize it's the same crew in different chairs. But, Finance Minister, you had \$3 billion in additional revenue, and the deficit got worse, not better.

What kind of signal does that send to job creators about the ability of the province to attract new jobs and new investment?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're record-breakers—

Hon. Charles Sousa: We are record-breakers because what we've done for five years in a row is, we have beaten our targets.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You're also lawbreakers.

Hon. Charles Sousa: For five years in a row, we have exceeded the targets, and our deficit has actually been—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask the member from Nepean–Carleton to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's necessary for us to always look to the long term and ensure that, while short-term targets may be amended as required, we will always stay on target to balance the books by 2017-18 in a very prudent and pragmatic way.

Every decision we're making is about creating jobs. It is why we have created over 450,000 net new jobs since the depth of the recession. It's why we have created over 650,000 net new jobs since 2003.

The economy is growing because of the investments and stimulus that we have made.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: We are making some progress. I did get the finance minister to admit they are record-breakers when it comes to debt in the province. In fact, the finance minister now knows that, under the Wynne-McGuinty Liberals, we actually have worse debt than California, considered the basket case of North America when it comes to debt. You are actually a record-breaker now; you have surpassed California.

The concern I have is—you mentioned the long term—this is the most damaging policy in the long term, to go deep in debt. That means we won't have money for things we care about, like help for special-needs kids and the best technology in our hospitals. It means jobs will leave the province and go to Alberta or Saskatchewan.

Minister, I think it's an extraordinary feat of incompetence to actually make the deficit bigger when you had more money coming in. What concerns me is, under your budget-leaking team, you're going to now have 39 new spending announcements of \$5.7 billion. My simple question is, where are you going to find the money?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As a result of the work and transformation that we have been doing, we're borrowing \$23 billion less this year than anticipated. Our deficit has come down five years in a row, well ahead of what we had targeted. We were the only government in all of Canada to actually cut spending year over year. We have controlled it at less than 1% for the last five years running. As a result of that, we have become the lowest-cost government per capita anywhere in Canada—anywhere at all. We're proud of that, because of the work that we're doing collaboratively with our stakeholders.

More importantly, we have already instituted 80% of Don Drummond's recommendations and have now exceeded even his anticipated forecast in the work that we've done, in the billions, because of what we have done going forward.

The member erroneously makes reference to California as if somehow that's a fair comparison. It is not. We are the largest subnational jurisdiction in the world that borrows; they cannot.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the finance minister. If I offended Californians by comparing them to the Wynne Liberals, I do apologize to California taxpayers.

I don't think what the minister said is in keeping with the actual facts. The minister said that they have cut spending. No; spending has actually gone up dramatically under the Liberals. The minister says they're the lowest-cost jurisdiction. Minister, low-cost jurisdictions do not run \$11-billion deficits.

I want to ask you one more thing—you know what? I'll go back, because you didn't answer my question. This week, you're rolling out, in your budget-leaking team plan, an additional \$400 million. I don't see where we're going to get that money. You're going to have 39 announcements for \$5.7 billion total. Isn't your plan going to drive Ontario into receivership? Our plan is going to drive Ontario onto the path to prosperity.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The opposition member wants to talk about the facts, so let's please talk about the facts. All this is is gimmicks and slogans and Ford-nation-type politics. Let's talk about the facts. We did cut spending last year, well beyond what was ever anticipated. We are the lowest per-capita-cost government because of the work we've done—substantially lower than all other provinces, even the federal government. We will announce these answers in the budget in this House, nowhere else, like the member has absolutely been making clear. Thankfully to them—

Mr. John Yakabuski: You've already announced them outside. What was that big speech about this morning?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings—now that's twice; please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thankfully, to the opposition, now Ontarians are well aware of our investments that we're planning to go forward with, because they recognize that that is important.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's just hard to ask the finance minister questions when his grip on the facts seems superficial at best. Your deficit actually went up. You actually increased the deficit in your first full year as finance minister. I'm using your own numbers. I'll use your own language. You rolled out on Wednesday a very—almost an embrace in mediocrity. You said that Ontario's long-term growth is going to be lower than the global average, weaker than the Americans, weaker than the British, weaker than the Australians, weaker than the other nine provinces, and that's if everything goes according to your plan. I believe Ontario can do a lot better than that. I've got a plan to create a million jobs in our province, an Ontario that leads again.

The minister boasts about his 39 big spending initiatives of \$5.7 billion of more borrowed money. I want to ask the minister: When we look through what you're announcing, in your budget outside of the House, why is there not one single idea on how to get Ontarians back to work in this great province?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The details and the announcements will be made in this House, nowhere else. We're going to be illustrating all of these initiatives in our budget in this House.

Let me say this: The member opposite talks about the facts. Here's a great fact that everyone should be well aware of: Our deficit—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's enough. Thank you. I'll send somebody home.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Our deficit is actually \$900 million lower than the Tim Hudak PCs promised for this time in their 2011 PC platform. They themselves projected a higher deficit, a higher spending number than we've actually achieved. We're outpacing them, and they have the audacity to say they can do otherwise.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, it's difficult to get answers from the finance minister when it seems like his grasp of the basic numbers is tangential at best. Again, the deficit under Dwight Duncan, your predecessor, was \$9.2 billion. You've increased it by over \$2 billion, despite more revenue coming in. I think that when you're adding on more and more debt, that challenges our ability to provide the services we care about, and it chases jobs out of the province of Ontario. You say the best we can do is trail the other nine provinces for the next 20 years. I say we can lead again. My plan will do exactly that.

Minister, when businesses and job creators look at Ontario, they see that you're on the path to tripling our debt, you've doubled our hydro rates and we have the worst red tape in all of Canada. Is it any wonder they're investing in other provinces, in other states? I've got a plan to bring the jobs back here to the province of Ontario, my million-jobs plan. If you have no plan, why don't you give our plan a try? It's going to work.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I find it passing strange—the member has just made reference to the fact that we have to afford the debt that we maintain, because that is critically important. That's what we measure, our net debt to GDP, and ensuring that it takes the proper trajectory so that we don't pass a burden of debt onto future generations. One of the ways we do that is ensuring that there's greater prosperity and economic revival. We've been en-

hancing that; they have chosen to do the opposite. We're making the investments necessary to prop up our economy and create those jobs which have been created and which under their leadership would not have been. So we will take those steps necessary.

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We have made a very dynamic and inviting business climate, because we have more businesses investing in Ontario than in most jurisdictions in North America. We have more start-ups in Ontario than all of Canada combined. That's a strong signal.

They want to go back to the days of assembly-line manufacturing—we can't compete. We need to compete on those jobs for tomorrow.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. It is unfortunate that the Premier is at a campaign-style event instead of being in the Legislature today to answer the questions.

When the Premier took over the Ontario Liberal Party, she said, "... we are going to build on the legacy of Dalton." Can the Acting Premier tell us whether this government is still so proud of that legacy of Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am enormously proud of the progress that we have made and continue to make under Premier Wynne. The member opposite feels it necessary to comment on the attendance of our Premier. What I would like to say is that our Premier has a very strong record, not only when it comes to attending question period, but to answering questions when she's here.

We've made significant progress. Last week, our finance minister announced that our revised deficit will meet our target by \$400 million. We gained 13,400 net new jobs in March, and our unemployment rate fell by 0.2%, to 7.3%. We are implementing Drummond's recommendations—we're 80% of the way there—to increase efficiencies. We've beaten our deficit target—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is unfortunate that the Premier couldn't be here today to answer the questions, but—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. No, actually, keep it going. Sorry.

It is not the tradition of this place to reference anyone's attendance in this House, and I would say not to do it again, please.

Carry on.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with regard to the ongoing investigation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock. We're going to get order.

Carry on, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With regard to the ongoing investigation by the OPP, the Premier said, "That is not the way government should operate. That is not the way a Premier's office should conduct itself." She's scrambling to distance herself from the Premier that she worked for, she served with, and she helped elect. Can the Acting Premier tell us whether the Liberals are still proud of the Dalton McGuinty legacy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When it comes to our Premier's response to the issues around the gas plants, I think any observer would know that there has been more openness and transparency from this Premier than we have seen before. When the Premier became Premier, she made it a top priority to bring openness and transparency to this issue, and we have taken appropriate steps.

One of the things we've done is we've improved record-keeping right across government. A directive to all political staff has been sent out. We've got mandatory training in place now. We're improving our archiving requirements—

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think Ontarians will be disappointed—sorry, I should take that back. People expect their government to be open and accountable, but instead of getting straightforward answers or actual accountability, we have a Liberal government pretending they've never heard of the leader that they served with for a decade, and a Premier who finds a lot of time to talk to lawyers but can't manage to make it to work. Does the Acting Premier think this is fair to families?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would hope that the member opposite will support the accountability act, because that will prohibit the wilful deletion of records; it would create a penalty.

We have been very, very open: 400,000 pages. Think about that for a minute: 400,000 pages of documents have been provided to the justice committee, including 30,000 pages from the Premier's office.

It's important that we get the facts out there; it is not helpful when there are unfounded allegations. We will continue to get the work done that the people of this province expect us to get done.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is again to the Acting Premier. On Friday, New Democrats wrote to the Premier to ensure that the former deputy chief of staff to the Premier, Laura Miller, could participate in the investigation about the wiping of government computers. Have the Ontario Liberals been in touch with the BC Liberals to ensure that Laura Miller can return to Ontario to be part of this investigation?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The justice committee right now is looking into the matter of the gas plants. They have the

responsibility and the right to call whichever witnesses they see fit. There's a process in place—you would be familiar with that, Mr. Speaker—if they do encounter any problems in terms of calling forward that witness.

But I would simply point out to the leader of the third party that the government has been co-operating fully, not only with the justice committee—the Premier herself was the one who asked for its mandate to be broadened and its powers increased—but we have also been co-operating fully with the Ontario Provincial Police in their investigation. We will continue to co-operate with everyone who's looking into this very serious matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The gas plant scandal has now crossed the Rockies. BC Liberal Premier Christy Clark isn't saying whether she thinks that Laura Miller should participate in the gas plant investigation here in Ontario. Will the Ontario Liberal government contact the BC Liberal government to explain how important it is for Ontarians to get to the bottom of the waste and the \$1.1 billion that was spent on the gas plant relocation and the wiping of computers in the Premier's office?

Hon. John Milloy: The other week I commented that I think a lot of members are watching old Ellery Queen reruns. Perhaps the leader of the third party is watching Perry Mason a little too much.

There is an ongoing police investigation. Let's have the police undertake their work. There's a committee of this Legislature which is considering this matter and considering which witnesses to bring forward. It is their right to put forward that list and to engage those witnesses put forward. Let's leave it to the committee to do their work.

I can speak for the government of Premier Wynne and say that we have co-operated fully with the justice committee. I appeared in front of it. The Premier appeared several times, as did the Minister of Energy and other members of this caucus. We will continue to co-operate with the justice committee.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The utter arrogance that the House leader of the Liberal government would make jokes about the work the opposition is trying to do to hold this government to account on the scandal that happened with the gas plants is unacceptable to the people of this province.

The gas plant scandal has become a nationwide scandal. Ontarians are wondering whether the Liberal government will do its part to ensure that a key Liberal witness participates in the ongoing investigations that are being done not only by the police but also by the members of this very Legislature.

Does the Acting Premier agree that it is important that Laura Miller and Peter Faist come back from British Columbia to be part of the gas plant investigation? Will the Acting Premier commit that the Ontario Liberals will send that message to the BC Liberals?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the government will co-operate fully with the justice committee and with the OPP investigation.

But if that honourable member wants to talk about arrogance, perhaps she should comment about her amnesia of the fact that it was the New Democratic Party as well as the Progressive Conservative Party that opposed the very gas plants that we're talking about. The fact of the matter is that all three parties of this Legislature are on record opposing those gas plants. If she wants to talk about arrogance, the fact is she has conveniently forgotten that fact because it makes her case not as straightforward. If she wants to talk about arrogance, then let's talk about her amnesia when it comes to that unfortunate fact.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is, as well, to the government House leader. In the twilight of his days here as member of provincial Parliament, can he confirm for this House that the individual who allegedly wiped clean, at the behest of the former Premier's chief of staff, 24 hard drives in that office had a criminal record? Yes or no?

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Hon. John Milloy: Again, there is an ongoing OPP investigation. I think we should allow the OPP to undertake their work. What we heard from the officer who appeared in front of the committee last week were two things: first of all, that the matter in hand dealt with Mr. Livingston under the former Premier, and also that members should stay out of it.

Mr. Speaker, I am very, very pleased that our Premier has sought some legal advice in this and has taken legal action, because what we are asking that member and the Leader of the Opposition is to retract their statements and to apologize. What's interesting is that member in particular has had some experience with this and has had to do it in the past, so perhaps, based on that experience, she should take the same action.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm going to go back to the Minister of Government Services. This is actually a pretty big deal. We want to know if this is the policy of the Liberal government and the leader of the Ontario Liberal Party: to employ people with a criminal record without undergoing a security check, and to give them unfettered access to the government's most secret information to allegedly then destroy that information to avoid public scrutiny.

Two Ontario judges said this individual was "inconsistent" as a witness and "lacked credibility." But it was the minister's government, his caucus and his party, that, up until last weekend, allowed this individual to access some of the most sensitive government, legislative and party documents. In fact, the Minister of Government Services has been the government House leader the entire time. As the constitutionally responsible minister of the IT of the government—

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, much of what was said by that member—allegations which are unproven—is in fact the topic of the OPP investigation. Let's leave it with the OPP.

But, again, the honourable member seems to need some reminding of January 31, 2005, when she put out a statement that I'd like to read in part to the House: "The operators of www.bluedraft.com"—that was a blog that the member was involved with—"Ms. Lisa MacLeod"—the member from Nepean—Carleton—"and Chris Froggatt, would like to sincerely apologize to Maureen Murphy-Makin and Rick Morgan for wrongfully implicating them in an erroneous story in January 2004 revolving around the decision by former PC leader Peter MacKay not to seek the leadership of the new Conservative Party of Canada. We admit that the facts as reported in the article were false and unfortunately based on a misleading source" and it goes on and on, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

It's not acceptable to read anything into the record that you cannot say that is unparliamentary language, so I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Hon. John Milloy: I withdraw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Those who decide to pre-empt what I'm trying to do will also have the same problem.

New question.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Acting Premier. The government keeps claiming that they're being open, but reports are still kept secret. It was because of an OPP anti-rackets branch warrant that we learned that the Ontario public service's cyber security branch completed a report on the Premier's office computers that were wiped clean, allegedly by Peter Faist. Will the Acting Premier make that report public today?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Government Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Speaker, again, I think this is a selective presentation of the facts. If the honourable member reads the document that was released by the court about a week and a half ago, it makes reference to a number of activities, including the one he just referenced, which are all part of the ongoing OPP investigation.

I want to state very clearly: The investigation is entirely independent, as it should be. OPP investigators have been working with a federal crown attorney from the Public Prosecution Service of Canada from the beginning to ensure its independence.

The member opposite seems to be suggesting that the government should somehow be interfering or inserting itself in the investigation. That would be entirely inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. I think the good advice that we heard

from the OPP officer last Thursday is, let's allow them to do their work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Acting Premier: We learned that the Liberal Party itself also has a secret report. Only when the allegations about Peter Faist were made public in an unsealed police warrant did the government say, "An internal investigation was conducted.... The company was informed yesterday that its services at the party office were terminated."

Will the Acting Premier tell Ontarians what that internal investigation found?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the honourable member should check his facts, as should much of the opposition. The fact is, as was announced—and I believe I said it here in the Legislature, or perhaps the Premier—when those court documents were unsealed, we looked into the matter and determined the two contracts that we have made public, and the details of those, as is appropriate, were turned over to the police. They will determine if it's relevant to their investigation.

In fact, the OPP has the leadership in this independent investigation, and the advice that we heard—very prudent advice—last week from the OPP officer in front of the justice committee is, let's allow the OPP to do their work and stop this amateur detective hour here in the Legislature.

DIABETES

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today, on World Health Day, I want to raise the issue of one of the most prevalent and debilitating chronic diseases facing our province today.

Nearly one and a half million Ontarians live with diabetes. Diabetes is an illness that disproportionately impacts those from the South Asian and African communities in this province, and the prevalence of diabetes in Ontario is rising.

Like many other diseases, awareness is the first step to living a healthier life. Due to the stigma that is still attached to diabetes, many diabetics do not openly disclose that they suffer from it. Could the minister tell us what can be done to address the needs of Ontarians with diabetes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Scarborough—Rouge River for this very important question. Diabetes does affect many families right across the province, and that's why people living with diabetes who need help managing their condition have access to much more services than were available a decade ago.

Later today, I'll be participating in the launch of the Canadian Diabetes Association's Diabetes Charter for Canada. This charter will give people with diabetes a stronger voice. It articulates a set of rights held by those suffering from the disease and it advocates for timely patient-centred care. This is the approach we're driving throughout our health care system. We're working to

encourage patients to be at the centre of their decision-making.

Part of this is a focus on public education to help people with diabetes manage their illness, and that's why we've moved to put out a new video to help diabetics properly monitor their blood glucose levels, available at ontario.ca/diabetes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The information the minister provided on the diabetes charter is interesting and is something that will be able to aid all of those who suffer from this disease.

In my riding, the Malvern community is serviced by Taibu Community Health Centre. This organization provides localized care that is catered to the community needs. This localized care at Taibu includes a diabetes education program. The goal of this program is to improve the quality of life for people affected by type 2 diabetes by providing a culturally and linguistically appropriate service and high standards of diabetes care and education that promote self-management.

Like this program, there are several other examples of how our health care system is working to improve the lives of those living with diabetes and encouraging everyone to take steps to prevent diabetes. Can the minister please share the other initiatives our government has taken to fight diabetes and keep Ontarians healthy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm proud to say under our government every Ontarian with diabetes who wants a family doctor gets one. Since 2008, our Ontario diabetes strategy has improved access and quality of care for Ontarians with diabetes. We're the first province in Canada to fully fund insulin pumps for children and adults with type 1 diabetes; we provide screening and early detection programs—more than 2,700 high-risk individuals were screened last year; we've established six centres for complex diabetes care; and we have increased the number of diabetes education teams from 220 to 321.

But the best way to fight diabetes is to prevent it in the first place. That's why we've introduced proposed legislation, the Making Healthier Choices Act, to help parents make the best choice for their kids and families by providing nutritional information on menus. I urge all members to support this legislation.

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POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Acting Premier.

Many in our caucus have spent a lot of time getting to the bottom of the gas plant scandal. We've all seen your systematic attempt to keep the truth from coming out. In fact, many of us were victims of your attempts. You produce some documents and say, "That's everything." We push, and two weeks later we get 20,000 more documents. You tell us it was \$40 million to cancel; we push and the Auditor General tells us it's \$1.1 billion. We bring contempt; you bring prorogation. We ask you to

bring in the OPP; you laugh. We bring in the OPP; we get damning evidence. You try to silence our leader; we get suspicious.

If we had stopped at any of the roadblocks you put up, we wouldn't have learned the cost of this scandal or the depths you've gone to cover this up. What are you hiding?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. The member will withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. John Milloy: You know, I feel like that guy in the old movies after the Broadway plays, when everyone sits around waiting for the reviews to come in. Well, the reviews are in on how that party, particularly the leader, has handled this issue. Let me share some of the quotes.

Headline in the Sudbury Star, April 3: The Leader of the Opposition "Loses Credibility with Cover-Up Claims." Again, the Sudbury Star, April 3: The Leader of the Opposition "engaged in unnecessary and ugly vitriol over the computer hard-drive controversy."

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're looking for some answers from you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Warned. You know what that means. Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: Sudbury Star, April 3: If the Leader of the Opposition "is prone to such ill-advised remarks in opposition, voters might well wonder how he can be trusted as Premier."

Globe and Mail, April 1: "The Conservative leader's aggressive attempts to score"—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Acting Premier, you can all laugh, but we have said all along that the deletion, destruction and denials were going to be a bigger scandal than the \$1.1-billion gas plant cancellation. It exposes what is at the very core of the Liberal Party. You went to great pains to block any evidence from ever coming forward. You turned over documents; we fought and got more. You deleted emails; we got them restored. You destroyed emails; we called in the OPP.

You've gone to great lengths all along the way to stop us from ever getting to the truth, and now we know why. We learn of widespread deletion of documents in the very office of the Premier. What's so damning that you have to destroy those emails?

Interjections.

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, a number of my colleagues have asked for more, and I've got more.

Globe and Mail, April 1: "The Conservative leader's aggressive attempts to score points without the facts to

back them up are reminding Ontario voters why they haven't warmed up to him."

Toronto Star, April 1: The Leader of the Opposition is "inventing fanciful scenarios about the first days of Wynne's premiership."

Globe and Mail editorial, April 1: "Ontario Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak is on thin legal ice...."

Globe and Mail, April 1: The Leader of the Opposition's "Reckless Allegations Against Wynne are Reminders of Previous Mistakes."

The reviews speak for themselves. The fact is, this is a serious issue. The OPP are looking into it. Let's allow the OPP to continue their work. It was very clear last Thursday, in the testimony to the committee, that this is about what happened under the previous Premier's watch, and they are simply wrong.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. When did the Liberal government first become aware that the Peter Faist who was working for this Liberal Party was the very same Peter Faist who the OPP information to obtain—who, according to that document, staffers alleged was seen wiping computers in the Premier's Office?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I believe that I answered my colleague's question several days ago. When this court document was made public, a week ago Thursday, we looked into the matter and information came to light about two contracts. We made that information public here in question period; I believe the Premier commented on it in a scrum.

Several days later—I believe it was the Sunday—Mr. Faist's company was told that their services were no longer needed by the Ontario Liberal Party. That has been a matter of public record now for a week or 10 days since this story first broke.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Acting Premier tell Ontarians what the internal investigation found that led the Liberals to distance themselves from Peter Faist more than a year after, according to the OPP information to obtain, staffers alleged they saw him doing work on computers in the Premier's office?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm patient, Mr. Speaker. About 10 days ago, a court document came forward that talked about some of the details of an OPP investigation, an investigation that has been a matter of public record, I believe, for about a year or so. What that court document suggested was that there were allegations, serious yet unproven, against Mr. Livingston, the former chief of staff to the former Premier.

What we have learned over and over again, in both that court document and testimony before the committee, is that there is an ongoing investigation by the OPP.

What we also learned, with the advice from the OPP, is that the best thing for us to do is to stop playing amateur hour here in the Legislature, allow the OPP to finish their investigation and reach whatever conclusions they see fit, and then proceed through the justice system if that is the case. The honourable member and his colleagues are being reckless and they're being irresponsible.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Education. As the minister knows, one of the issues we've dealt with in high-growth boards such as the Peel District School Board is funding provided for special education through the High Needs Amount. I have spoken with our board and responded to questions from some parents and school councils in the western Mississauga communities of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville. Our concern is with how equitable the high-needs funding is.

Last week at Lisgar Middle School, I spoke with about four dozen parents and educators, along with the chair and the director of education at the Peel District School Board, to discuss special-needs funding provided through Grants for Student Needs. Would the minister provide the House an update on how some of the inequities that existed are being addressed this year and how funding is provided for students with special needs?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for his question. We have indeed heard from his community as well as others about the need to address the High Needs Amount for special education through the Grants for Student Needs.

Boards have correctly observed that there are funding inequities because the date on which the old model is based is out of date; we need to update the demographic data. We've been working with education stakeholders and actually a number of outside experts, getting their advice over the last few years on how we can update the special funding model. We are taking their advice, and this year we've introduced a four-year phase-in of a different funding model for high-needs students, which reflects the expert advice. The Peel District School Board, amongst several others, will, in fact, see their High Needs Amount increase.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: As the minister knows, one of the many ways in which we invest in people is to build our education system. The minister has already described one of the ways we support school boards to ensure that they have the resources to deliver a high-quality education for our students.

Another way we invest in education is making sure we have the facilities for that high-quality education to be delivered in. This year, the ministry has approved three new elementary school projects worth more than \$45 million for the Peel District School Board, which serves Mississauga and Brampton. These new schools will add to the 61 schools that are built, planned or under con-

struction in the Peel District School Board and that have received funding since 2003.

Peel region continues to grow rapidly and we need the Ministry of Education to continue to invest in the people choosing to call Peel home. Would the minister explain to the House how funding decisions for capital investments are made?

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Hon. Liz Sandals: As the member noted, I was in the riding next to him recently, in Brampton West, to announce funding for three new schools in the Peel District School Board. That's part of the \$12-billion investment in new schools and major additions that we've made since 2003.

But the process is this: The boards submit their capital requests each October to the ministry. They're required to provide detailed business cases. This year, we received requests for 260 projects worth over \$2.6 billion. What happens is, my ministry goes through those detailed business cases and looks at a number of factors. This year, we were pleased to announce that we're providing funding for 78 capital projects, including 39 new schools, 30 additions and eight renovations in boards all across Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Ministry of Energy. Minister, we know how deeply involved your predecessor Mr. Bentley was in the gas plants cancellation decision. I want to know your involvement in this file since you have been there over a year.

This is an energy file, and the expertise lies within the Ministry of Energy. I want to know what contribution or critical path you provided to the Premier on the cancellation file. We know your ministry conducted an internal review. What did you find? Were any files deleted in your ministry?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, when I was appointed Minister of Energy approximately a year ago, I devoted all of my time to working on a new long-term energy plan. We did province-wide consultation in every corner, we consulted with First Nations people, and we came forward with an agenda that has been very well accepted by stakeholders across the board, including environmentalists, unions, people in the nuclear sector, renewables and hydro.

My involvement, to be fair to the question, has been zero in terms of my engagement. Everything had taken place beforehand. I was looking to the future and I concentrated all my efforts on having a very effective electricity system in the province of Ontario.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: Again to the minister: Ontario's privacy commissioner has said, "In this day and age, ignorance is no excuse. Transparency of government activities, reflected in their records, is essential to freedom and liberty." I agree with the commissioner: Transparency

and accountability are paramount to delivering good government.

Ontarians still don't know everything about your government's scandal. Minister, how has your office been involved with the OPP investigation? Further, were any files on any computers in your office or your ministry deleted or wiped clean by the accused Liberal Party techie, Mr. Faist?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Government House leader.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's your file.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon will come to order.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Quite frankly, I'm very pleased the honourable member mentioned Dr. Ann Cavoukian, the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Let me share some quotes—you'll want to hear this—what Dr. Ann Cavoukian said about the current government.

On July 26, 2013, she said, "I think on a go-forward basis, the government really is looking to change things. The government is dedicated to opening up access to government data."

June 25, 2013: "This government, with respect to my investigation and the work that we have done"—

Interjection.

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

Hon. John Milloy: —"has been very forthcoming.... [A]ny co-operation we needed was there."

June 13, 2013: "I have commended Premier Kathleen Wynne's government's approach to dealing with this issue, referencing the staff training program she instituted and the memo circulated by her chief of staff."

June 25, 2013: "I'm pleased now to report that the new government has acted proactively to address the recommendations made in my report."

Mr. Speaker, I will let the words of the Information and Privacy Commissioner speak for themselves.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we go to the next question, the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

New question.

SECURITY AT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. Ontario's correctional system is in crisis, with increased violence, persistent overcrowding and class action lawsuits against the government.

Ontarians learned today through FOI that there were 3,000 prisoner-on-prisoner attacks in 2012 to 2013, an increase of 30% from five years ago. This rise in violence comes at the same time as overcrowding in correctional

facilities, with almost half of Ontario's jails above capacity last year alone.

Will this government act now to address the overcrowding and stop the violence in Ontario jails?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I thank the member from London for her question. We have violence in the workplace, but that's why we track statistics like inmate-on-inmate violence: to help us determine if our policy needs to change in order to deliver an effective and efficient correctional service to meet the needs of a changing offender population. As we know, inmates can be difficult at times and unpredictable, so despite best efforts, like I said, violence does occur in our jail facilities.

We have invested approximately \$10 million in new surveillance camera systems in our larger facilities. This is to enhance our monitoring capacity. We have increased staff in our facilities, and we are training new staff to add in our facilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Obviously, more needs to be done. Too many inmates within our system are released back into the community after experiencing violence in custody, which is not only inhumane, but puts public safety at risk.

During his eight months at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, Glenn Johnson was beaten, stabbed with a pencil and suffered multiple concussions. Some inmates, like Adam Kargus at EMDC, do not live to tell the tale and die during their incarceration.

What will it take for this government to act and address the many issues in Ontario's jails?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: There have been a lot of improvements in our jail system. We have opened two new modern facilities. We are modernizing our old facilities. We stopped the closure of the Sarnia jail. We have added 2,000 new beds into this facility.

We wanted to make sure that both inmates and staff are safe in the workplace. We will continue to improve. We are training new staff. We have hired approximately 200 to 300 correctional officers in 2014, and approximately the same number will be hired in 2015—additional recruits, graduates over the past six months; 188 new recruitments. We will continue to add the tools to be able to keep everyone safe—

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

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, last fall your ministry had undertaken a variety of open houses to discuss how best to reform the land use planning system. Residents in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt want our government to ensure that the planning system remains responsive to the changing needs of our communities while ensuring that we support our municipalities, Ontario development and the construction industry.

Many people think about development challenges in downtown Toronto, whereas communities like mine in Scarborough–Agincourt face similar concerns. My residents are also concerned about how development changes affect their community.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please explain to my constituents what our government is doing to ensure they will have a voice on how Scarborough will develop?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. Our government believes in having a strong land use planning system that gives municipalities the tools to manage growth so we can build the cities and towns we want to live, work and raise a family in.

I can understand, however, why your constituents would find the current system a bit difficult to navigate. In fact, we have heard from municipal leaders, planning officials, developers and the public that the rules can be too complex and the delays and appeals too frustrating. That is why our government is moving forward with a refresh of this important system by listening to everyday Ontarians, municipal politicians and community groups at regional workshops, and those workshops were conducted right across the province: Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Mississauga, Toronto, and in my home community of Thunder Bay.

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Speaker, as a result of that, we're looking forward to continuing the work that was done by the former minister to ensure that the land use planning system is going to work for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to hear that our government is giving municipalities the tools to be able to plot their own destiny and build communities that work for the residents. But despite the tools that municipalities have regarding development, projects can still be contentious.

In fact, across Toronto, there are projects that worry the local councillors, the community and even the city planners. They believe that Toronto should be outside of the Ontario Municipal Board.

In my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, though they are sympathetic towards removing the OMB, they worry that this sort of change would make it even more difficult and expensive to challenge projects that they believe are out of place in the community as it would now have to go through the court systems.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please explain to my constituents the importance of a well-structured land use planning system and the importance of the Ontario Municipal Board?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Again, I want to thank the member for the question. We do, of course, understand how important well-planned development is for our communities, and that's why the OMB is so critical. We know the OMB has made decisions from time to time that are contentious in some of our communities, and that's why

during this review our government has listened to constructive ideas surrounding the OMB.

The OMB makes dispute resolution easier, cheaper and faster for community groups and municipalities than the courts—that's important, Speaker; we need to all remember that. It plays an important role in hearing land use appeals, attempting to balance the provincial planning policy with local planning decisions and community interests.

However, suggestions that we have received from the third party about how to reform the planning system are not solutions, Speaker. The proposed changes are haphazard, they are piecemeal, and they would only increase the cost and time spent by community groups and municipalities to appeal planning disputes.

That's why our government can move forward with a land use planning refresh that will deal fairly with all of the communities, from north to south, while ensuring that as our communities grow they remain sustainable, stronger and more vibrant.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Jane McKenna: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, you may recall that several Liberal cabinet ministers quit last year: Laurel Broten; Margaret Best; your predecessor, Dwight Duncan. Even the Premier jumped ship; so did his staff. The slate was wiped clean. Anyone curious about how much these folks made in severance would naturally check the sunshine list. If they did, they would not find any answers.

Minister, why is your government hiding this salary information? And if it can't get this much right, what else is it hiding?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we're not hiding anything. We're the party that brought forward an open transparency act. We are the ones who are disclosing more information than any other government—it's in the public domain.

In fact, C.D. Howe Institute has just ranked Ontario as one of the top governments in Canada for full disclosure and integrity of our numbers. We'll continue to do that. Just read the books; they are there to be seen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary, please?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Minister, the sunshine list is one of Ontario's longest-running measures of government accountability. Three years ago, the sunshine list showed that former eHealth executive and deputy health minister Ron Sapsford took home \$762,000, despite the fact that he had quit the year before.

After that story broke, Premier McGuinty vowed, "We're going to shine a light on all expenses so Ontarians will know who, exactly, is spending what, exactly."

Minister, if you're so dedicated to transparency, why can you not even meet the low bar set by the former Premier?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the sunshine list exists and it's displayed—we tell the public, and we dis-

close the information that's required. We've enhanced our transparency act to provide even further information and greater integrity of the numbers. As I said, C.D. Howe Institute—even Forbes has illustrated Ontario is one of the top jurisdictions, top governments, in the world in terms of its ability to have numbers with great integrity and transparency, and we will continue to do so.

I should remind the member opposite that their own numbers that they've claimed in their platform have not exceeded, have not even met, the targets that we've been able to achieve thus far. We're outpacing that party opposite, who claim that they can do better. Their numbers show that they would do worse.

We'll move ahead and do what's necessary for the benefit of all the people of Ontario.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment is warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation.

The Niagara region is united in calling for daily GO train service to Niagara Falls. Twelve Niagara mayors and the chamber of commerce have all called on this government to bring GO to Niagara and to make it a top priority, to improve the region's economy. Niagara Falls faces one of the highest unemployment rates in the province. The Niagara regional chair, Gary Burroughs, says GO can be a game-changer for our local economy.

Will the minister commit to a timeline to finally bring GO train service to Niagara?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I appreciate the question from the honourable member.

We are in the middle of the largest expansion of GO in our history. We have now exceeded \$10 billion of investment in GO, and we have now extended service, as you know. I take that train on the weekend because I cycle in St. Catharines and Niagara.

To move to all-day two-way GO service to Niagara, we have issues of canal crossing, track acquisition, which costs hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars, so we're trying to build that into our plan.

One way the member opposite and his party could help would be supporting the government in its efforts to bring in the new revenue tools so that we can actually pay for a greater extension. We look forward to working with the third party, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to some clarity on their position on funding transit because that's all that's holding us back from doing it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, a petition is circulating in Niagara to bring daily GO train service to Niagara; it already has more than 2,400 signatures. The unemployed and the underemployed in Niagara can't

wait any longer. This government has had years of studies and discussions on bringing daily commuter rail service to Niagara. The time for promises is over. When will this government bring daily commuter GO rail service to Niagara?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We actually have not been studying and studying and studying. We've been investing: \$10 billion—\$14 billion in infrastructure.

I say to the honourable member, because I think we would agree on this, that the party opposite spent \$1.4 billion on infrastructure. We spent \$14 billion. For 30 years in this province, we underinvested in infrastructure. So we are making up for a 30-year backlog.

How do we accelerate what is already the biggest investment in GO and rapid transit in Ontario's history? It takes more money.

We do not have a majority in this House, so we look to our friends in the third party to get greater clarity on a range of revenue tools that they could support with us. We're told by you that you support transit, but it takes more than words; it takes writing a cheque. We need to raise the money to write the cheque, and we look to the member and his party to support us in that effort.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Speaker, the warm weather is a welcome change for my constituents in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. It's that time of year when everyone wants to get outside and tour, not only in my community, but in communities across Ontario. With the change in weather, bicycles and running shoes have finally come out of storage. Members of my community are able to tour on foot or on bike and see what Ontario has to offer.

Although the warm weather is welcome, it also raises concerns about cycling and pedestrian safety.

1140

Speaker, I was delighted to hear about the introduction of Bill 173, Keeping Ontario's Roads Safe. Through you to the minister, I'd like to hear what is included in this bill that will help keep my constituents safe as they enjoy this warm weather and tour around communities across Ontario.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: There are two threes in this. One, I want to give credit to all members of this House because this bill contains ideas from both the opposition parties as well as the government.

The other three is not just three parties, but three groups. One: For motorists, this will change the inspection standards and introduce very strong powers for the registrar to make sure that Ontarians are protected from buying substandard used vehicles and to get those unsafe vehicles off the road—a very big priority for motorists. For cyclists, this introduces things like the one-metre rule and dooring, which will actually remove the biggest causes the coroner has told us are risks to the lives of all of us who cycle. It is also really important because this

will allow municipalities a greater range of options with pedestrian crossings and give pedestrians more rights on the road.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time is up for question period.

VISITORS

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

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I would like to offer a warm welcome to the Trillium Gift of Life Network as they join us today in the Legislature and to encourage every member here to come this evening to a reception at 5:30 in the dining room where you'll have the opportunity to hear from the families that have given and those families that have received.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General, on a point of order.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I just want to correct my record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please go ahead.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: In answering the member from London West, I said something like I agree that there is violence in the workplace. I meant violence in the correctional facilities. Thank you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: A point of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

I will briefly summarize the many precedents and arguments that I put forward in my written submission to you this morning. I rise today after providing you with the appropriate notice regarding my intention to stand on a point of privilege for contempt of this Legislature.

Last week, the Ontario PC caucus was given a rollout calendar prepared by the Liberal government's self-proclaimed budget-leaking—

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Do you want me to wait a moment while they leave, Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm still listening. I'm taking notes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you—the Liberals' self-proclaimed budget-leaking team. It outlined 39 budget policy announcements and \$5.7 billion in additional spending over the course of 27 days in the lead-up to the May budget.

Before rising on a point of privilege, Speaker, I waited to see if this calendar was an accurate portrayal of the government's plan to announce budget initiatives. On Friday, it became clear that this was indeed the case. On Friday, the minister responsible for seniors made the government's first budget announcement regarding the

seniors' grant program. This event can be found on page 3 of the document titled Pre-Doc Communications Roll-out, or the budget-leaking team, that I gave you.

The issue at hand is what appears to be a coordinated effort by the Liberal government to make budget announcements outside of the Legislature via public relations events. The fact that this government has formed a team of Ministry of Finance officials and labelled them as a "budget-leaking team" demonstrates that the government fully intends on leaking the budget as a public relations stunt.

O'Brien and Bosc describe the budget as "a formal budget presentation, offering a comprehensive assessment of the financial standing of the government and giving an overview of the nation's economic condition." They go on to state, "there is a long-standing tradition of keeping the contents of the budget secret until the Minister of Finance actually presents it in the House."

Unfortunately, under this Liberal government, we have seen budget announcements become more prominent and frequent. These announcements release key components of the budget to the public before the opposition gets to hold the government to account in the Legislature.

Quite frankly, I'm concerned that the government's behaviour is a potential contempt of this Legislature. Speaker, I want to be explicitly clear today. I am not claiming that there was a breach of member's privilege inside the Legislature, but rather I believe that the government's decision to hold public relations events to announce budget initiatives amounts to a contempt of the Legislature because it lessens the role of the Legislature.

Parliamentary experts support this position. O'Brien and Bosc state that: "[A]ll breaches of privilege are contempts of the House, but not all contempts are necessarily breaches of privilege." Erskine May describes contempt as: "[A]ny act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions..." He then goes on to say that: "Indignities offered to the House by words spoken or writings published reflecting on its character or proceedings have been punished by both the Lords and the Commons upon the principle that such acts tend to obstruct the Houses in the performance of their functions by diminishing the respect due to them."

That is why I'm calling on you to intervene in this matter. It is concerning that this Liberal government is more focused on rolling out their budget initiatives outside of the Legislature and diminishing the respect that is due to the function of the House. It's an example of the government ignoring the House and the fact that they are accountable to Ontarians via the MPPs who sit in this assembly. Purposely making budget announcements well in advance of a budget motion or bill being tabled in the House goes against what we do as parliamentarians and what we do in Parliament. The role of parliamentarians is to hold the government accountable. When the government bypasses Parliament, it is an affront to parliamentary democracy.

Finally, I want to draw the Speaker to the precedent from this Legislature which supports my point of privilege. I refer you, Speaker, to Speaker Carr's ruling from May 8, 2003, regarding the government's presentation of the Magna budget. Speaker Carr's ruling focused on the fact that when budgets are presented outside of the House "there is a danger that the representative role of each and every member of this House is undermined, that respect for the institution is diminished, and that Parliament is rendered irrelevant." Carr went on to say: "Parliamentary democracy is not vindicated by the government conducting a generally one-sided public relations event on the budget well in advance of members having an opportunity to hold the government to account for the budget in this chamber." This is precisely what is at issue here. The government has employed a budget-leaking team to make budget announcements to the public long before members of this Legislature see it.

In the Magna case, Carr ruled that a prima facie case of contempt existed because the issue raised too many questions and concerns. In his ruling, he expressed the uneasiness about the road the government was going. He found that, "It is one thing not to make the traditional budget speech in the House because the government is backed into such a decision by an ongoing House process, or a budget leak; it is quite another for the government to have a deliberate plan not to do so."

Speaker, in 2003, Speaker Carr clearly ruled that the Magna budget was a mistake. This is why we were so shocked when the Liberals planned and then executed the same thing over a decade later.

In conclusion, members of this House are concerned with the recent actions by the government not only to employ a budget-leaking team, but to make budgetary announcements in advance of the budget. It is concerning that this has been a growing trend. The government is more focused on media and public relations, rather than being accountable to the members of this Legislature. Announcing budgetary initiatives outside of the Legislature removes the function of our Parliament and our ability to hold the government to account. Any ruling other than a prima facie case of contempt will inevitably lead to even more egregious abuse. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I don't want to take a lot of time, but I want to weigh in on this particular point of privilege that's being raised by the member. We need to remember that the main function of what this Legislature is about is the approval of money. That's what this thing is all about. Dating back to the model Parliament of 1295 is when the people—or in those days, the barons and others—decided that you could not allow the King—in this case the executive—the right to spend money and the right to tax without having Parliament do the actual approval. So back to 1295, and that's a pretty long history, there's all kinds of evidence where essentially the executive in this case, but back then the King, is essentially precluded from being able to spend money

and to tax people without the approval of the Legislature. So when you have a government that's essentially out there trying to find ways of getting around announcing things that are, quite frankly, directly related to the budget, it's a diminishment of the role of this House. The members of this House, our large responsibility, if you take a look at what the constitution calls for in regard to the makeup of the Legislature, is to approve the budget and to make sure that we give approval to the taxation—if we decided to do that; in this case we probably wouldn't—or when it comes to expenditures.

1150

When a government is trying to get around the provision of what this Parliament is all about, I think it gives us a responsibility of stepping back and looking at what is really being done here. I would argue that this is, again, just a weakening of what I think is the role and responsibility of this Legislature when a government decides to try to get around what the responsibility of the Legislature is, and I would ask you to give this all due consideration.

Hon. John Milloy: I am pleased to respond on behalf of the government. Mr. Speaker, I've had a chance to review the presentation that was sent by the member from Nipissing to myself and the other House leaders several hours ago. I would argue that the point of privilege he has raised is completely without merit. The presentation has confused the concept of budget secrecy, which is a political convention, with the presentation of a budget outside of the House. The former does not give rise to contempt.

Previous Speakers' rulings confirm that budget secrecy is a matter of parliamentary convention and not a matter of privilege. In one example that I'll share with you, Sauvé noted that a breach of budget secrecy has "no impact on the privileges of a member." She went on to say that "it has to do with the conduct of a minister in the exercise of his administrative responsibility."

In a May 9, 1983, ruling, the Speaker of this House noted, "I have been unable to find any precedent which states that the matter of budget secrecy is one which may be treated as a question of privilege." The Speaker went on to say, "Budget secrecy is a political convention, as is the practice that the Treasurer presents his budget in the House before discussing it in any other public forum. It has nothing to do with parliamentary privilege."

Indeed, prior rulings make it clear that it is appropriate to announce policy and publish material for consultation, and take reasonable planning measures in advance of the passage of legislation, provided that it does not adversely impact the legislative process or rights of the members in the legislative process.

On February 22, 2005, in this Legislature, Speaker Curling stated the following when ruling on a similar motion: "There is nothing wrong with anticipation per se—it happens a lot; the issue is whether the announcement goes further and reflects adversely on the parliamentary process." He went on to say, "In my opinion, the wording and the tone of the documents are not dismissive

of the legislative role of the House. On the contrary, they indicate that the government had plans and proposals that require not only negotiation, but also the introduction and passage of legislation. In particular, the board letter and press release contain conditional phrases such as 'intends to introduce legislation,' 'we are proposing,' and 'legislation that, if passed.'" That's the end of the excerpt from Speaker Curling's ruling that I wanted to share.

The only case cited by the member from Nipissing that relates to the budget process is, of course, the May 8, 2003, prima facie finding of contempt made by Speaker Gary Carr. In that case, the member's own party presented a budget speech in a private facility during a time when the House was prorogued. This is obviously an entirely different set of circumstances. There has not been any attempt or intention to deliver the budget speech for this particular budget outside of this House. The Minister of Finance fully intends to deliver the budget speech in the House in the normal course.

I close on this: It is important to note that it was the PCs who first made the information that is the subject of this point of privilege public. So if the member truly believes that presenting this information before the formal introduction of the budget is a matter of contempt, why would he be so quick to make it public? It's clear that the point of privilege which the member from Nipissing raises is without merit.

I, of course, Mr. Speaker, will provide you with the references that I have raised today, as well as to my colleagues in the other parties.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I would just point out, and I do this respectfully, but the honourable House leader for the government side hinges his argument on a point of privilege—I assume of an individual member. We are seeking a prima facie case of contempt of the House. As you know from precedent, there is a great distinction. I would just remind you of page 2 of our submission and ask you to seriously consider that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their contribution and discussion on this particular topic. I will reserve my ruling for a later date in order to devote some time to this and to ensure the ruling is appropriate.

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

The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is my honour today to welcome Théophile Rwigimba and members of the Rwandan Diaspora in Toronto on this solemn occasion.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I would like to introduce Bill Miller, who is here from Georgetown and who is the president of the Georgetown Highland Games, held in June every year. It is a wonderful occasion that we should all take advantage of.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CONNECTING LINK PROGRAM

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Suppose I bought a new car and sent you the bill for all the repairs. Likewise, municipalities are calling out this government for demanding that they foot the bill to maintain provincial roads and bridges. For decades, governments of all parties have agreed that wouldn't be fair. But then the McGuinty-Wynne government came along and scrapped the Connecting Link Program.

I have raised this issue with two Premiers and two Ministers of Transportation to support the municipalities I represent. In response, the government bragged about its MIII program, as if it were somehow a replacement for Connecting Link; it's not.

The township of Wellington North faces over \$1 million in repairs to the Rick Hopkins Bridge. Most of the traffic on that bridge is not from Wellington North. Connecting Link used to acknowledge that and would have covered 90% of the cost. But now the local taxpayers could be on the hook for a 4% tax hike.

At ROMA, I supported West Perth in its discussion with the Minister of Transportation regarding the Blanchard Bridge. It's expected to need over \$700,000 in repairs. But they are also getting no help at all from this government to pay for upkeep to a provincial bridge.

The government needs to admit the damage they are doing to infrastructure in rural Ontario and take another look at Connecting Link. They need to stop punishing rural Ontario for their own mistakes.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Back in March, several organizations in the London area were awarded Ontario Trillium Foundation community grants, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge these groups.

The Alzheimer Society will use the grant to launch three new recreational programs for people living with dementia.

The Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre is investing in community engagement to address and find solutions to a lack of access to fresh food in the Hamilton Road area.

The Holy Cross Romanian Orthodox Parish of London, the London Community Players and the Thistle Lawn Bowling Club will be upgrading their respective buildings' infrastructure.

The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration is developing and implementing a model for social service responses to new immigrant families' safety issues.

The Pillar Nonprofit Network will equip and staff a space for community leaders to create and foster new social innovations.

ReForest London will be engaging 48,000 volunteers to plant 15,000 trees as part of their Million Tree Challenge.

St. Joseph's Hospice plans to hire a spiritual care coordinator to assist clients and families coping with end-of-life issues.

The UWO Research and Development Park will help entrepreneurs and researchers develop their ideas into prototypes.

Finally, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority will restore and protect the Dorchester Mill Pond ecosystem.

I would like to congratulate all these local organizations for their receipt of the Trillium grants, which will allow them to advance their contributions to a healthy, innovative and eco-friendly London community.

DIABETES

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I want to inform the House about an important event that took place just down the hall from this chamber. This afternoon, members of the Canadian Diabetes Association attended Queen's Park for the unveiling of their Diabetes Charter for Canada.

This charter gives a strong voice to the nine million Canadians living with diabetes or pre-diabetes. In our own province, nearly one in 10 individuals lives with this disease. A further one in five has pre-diabetes. The numbers are growing rapidly, and a disproportionate number of them come from certain communities, like the South Asian community or the native Canadian community.

The Diabetes Charter for Canada outlines a set of rights held by all those who suffer from diabetes and calls for timely diagnosis followed by education and patient-centred care. This aligns with our government's transformation of health care. With our Ontario Diabetes Strategy and initiatives like health links, we are driving change that will wrap interdisciplinary care around patients and further empower diabetic Ontarians.

I want to congratulate the Canadian Diabetes Association on their achievement and thank them for the work they do every day. Their work touches every single one of us.

TARTAN DAY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I rise on the occasion of Tartan Day, which was celebrated on April 6, not only by Ontario but all of Canada and the USA. It was on April 6, 1320, that the charter of Scottish independence, known as the Declaration of Arbroath, was signed by King Robert the Bruce and his nobles.

On April 6, we pay tribute to the enduring Scottish legacy to Canada's foundation and development as a country. Scottish Canadians made a lasting contribution to Ontario through agriculture, which we celebrate during Agriculture Week. They helped establish our Legislative Assembly, academic institutions such as the University of Toronto, hospitals and new communities throughout

the province. Scotland's emblems are well represented in the Canadian coat of arms with the thistle, the cross of St. Andrew and the royal lion rampant, which is also above your head, Mr. Speaker.

It was my colleague from the Ontario PC caucus, the former MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, who established Ontario Tartan Day in the year 2000. I am proud to wear the Ontario tartan today, whose three shades of green represent Ontario's forests and fields; the blue, its water; and the white, the clouds of the sky.

This year, I have the honour and privilege to be the honorary chieftain of the 39th annual Georgetown Highland Games and Scottish festival, to which I invite all members of the House and, indeed, all those people who are listening. I would encourage you to come and enjoy it. If you've ever heard 300 bagpipes and 200 drums coming at you across a field; if you've ever seen them toss the caber and hammer and enjoyed the Scottish dancing and the dog trials, Georgetown is the place to be for the Scottish festival games. It will be a magnificent afternoon.

ANNIVERSARY OF RWANDAN GENOCIDE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as we have discussed, I will be asking for unanimous consent for a moment of silence at the end of statements.

Today is the date, April 7, that marks the 20th anniversary of the launch of the genocide against the Tutsis of Rwanda, recognized by them and globally as Kwibuka20. Kwibuka is the Kinyarwanda word for "remember."

As part of the past ceremonies of Kwibuka, survivors have spoken movingly of the horrors of the Rwandan genocide. As horrible as the experiences were for those who died during them or lived through them, they are even more painful because they were preventable. Rwandans died while the international community looked the other way or was actively complicit.

The facts are staggering. As cited by MP Irwin Cotler, in "less than 100 days, beginning on April 7, 1994, one million Rwandans, mostly ethnic Tutsis, were slaughtered, victims of a government-orchestrated campaign of incendiary incitement and unspeakable violence."

Members of the Rwandan community are here with us today to commemorate this somber occasion, to remind us that terrible wrongs can arise out of intolerance, hatred and racism.

I ask this House for unanimous consent for a moment of silence to commemorate all those who were lost and to carry forward the memory of what they went through so we can avoid such genocides in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Tabuns is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence after members' statements to signal our concern regarding the Rwandan issue. Do we agree? Agreed. We thank the member for that.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Phil McNeely: On March 29, Ontarians and people around the world observed Earth Hour by turning off their lights and other electrical devices. This is a simple step that reminds us that we can all do our part to conserve energy and address climate change.

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Other jurisdictions are taking meaningful action to do just that. In 2013, China installed more electricity-generating capacity powered by renewables—just under 60%—than from fossil fuels and nuclear. China is on track to be getting 15% of its total energy production from renewables by 2020—I believe, an investment of \$50 billion.

Wind is now competitive with other sources of electricity production, without considering the cost of carbon.

Solar has been coming down in price and is already competitive in many applications, without considering the health and environmental benefits.

The new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report is full of new warnings about climate change as we see the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere rise above 400 parts per million, reductions in arctic summer ice coverage, and increases in storm intensities and droughts. We cannot help but think of the future of our children and grandchildren and our beautiful environment.

Ontario is the first national or subnational government to get out of coal production of electricity, and our target for renewable energy of 10% is a realistic one. We should be proud of our record.

Even with Ontario's action and important action by other provinces, Canada, under the Conservative government, has the worst record for greenhouse gases in all the Western world. How will they explain to their children and grandchildren their opposition to all things green?

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to stand today to recognize World Health Day. Each year, World Health Day draws attention to an issue of major importance to global public health. This year's theme is vector-borne diseases. Common vectors include mosquitoes, sandflies and other bugs and insects, which carry a range of parasites and pathogens that can cause many different illnesses. The most deadly vector-borne disease is malaria, but in Ontario we might be more familiar with West Nile, another vector-borne disease.

The goal of this year's World Health Day campaign is to promote better protection from vector-borne diseases, especially for people living in places where they are a threat and for people travelling to countries where they may be at risk. The good news is that most vector-borne diseases are preventable.

I encourage Ontarians travelling to at-risk areas to research and take the appropriate preventive measures, such as sleeping under a bed net, wearing long-sleeved clothing, taking appropriate medications and using insect repellent.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: As we all know, April is Be a Donor Month. To give a donation of an organ and tissue is to give a gift of life. One donor can save up to eight lives and enhance 75 others through tissue donation. Currently, 1,500 Ontarians are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant. Every three days, one of them dies.

Donor registration helps save lives, as most families consent to organ donation when their loved ones are registered. Donor registration can be done easily online at beadonor.ca. Twenty-four per cent of Ontarians are actually registered. The registration rates among GTA residents are much lower, at 15%. To help save more lives, the Trillium Gift of Life Network has set an ambitious target to reach one million registered donors in the inner GTA.

I encourage all to join. The Trillium Gift of Life Network is hosting a reception today at 5:30 in the legislative dining room. I encourage all members to join.

VIMY RIDGE ANNIVERSARY

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise today to give tribute to this Wednesday, April 9, celebrating the 97th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge. This battle is commonly highlighted as a turning point in Canadian history, where four Canadian divisions fought together as a unified force for the first time. Three thousand, five hundred and ninety-eight Canadian soldiers' lives were lost.

The Vimy Foundation, founded in 2005, is a national, bilingual foundation. Its mission is to preserve and promote Canada's role in the First World War, a legacy of symbols, the most important one being the victory at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917.

The foundation itself is spreading awareness through its domestic and overseas educational and scholarship programs, distributing Vimy pins and Vimy pilgrimage medals, promoting greater recognition of April 9 as Vimy day, and planning events for the 100th anniversary of the battle itself and, this year, the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War.

In my riding, Uxbridge native Colonel Sam Sharpe led the 116th Battalion at Vimy Ridge and holds the distinction of being a sitting member of Parliament while serving in Europe. Also, he was a Conservative member under the Borden government in what was known then as the riding of Ontario North, now Durham. My son, Erin O'Toole, also served in the Canadian Armed Forces as one of the original founding members of the Vimy Foundation and now serves as an MP for the very same riding as Sam Sharpe.

Today, also in my riding, Dave Robinson, a retired history teacher from Port Perry, serves on the Vimy board. Every year, he leads pilgrimages of thousands of students to Vimy.

My final remark is that the Vimy Foundation reminds us all as Canadians to remember.

ANNIVERSARY OF RWANDAN
GENOCIDE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have unanimous consent to express a moment of silence to remember the lost lives in Rwanda. I would ask all members and guests to rise for a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): God rest their souls. Thank you.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

VICTIMS OF CRIME

VICTIMES D'ACTES CRIMINELS

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to mark National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, which is being commemorated across Ontario and the country this week.

The national theme for 2014 is: "Taking Action." This theme reminds all Canadians that across the country countless dedicated professionals and volunteers continue to take action to support victims of crime every day in an effort to lessen victims' trauma and help them move forward with their lives.

Notre gouvernement est réputé, bien au-delà des limites de notre province, pour son engagement à aider les victimes d'actes criminels.

Nous sommes connus pour nos programmes d'avant-garde, en constante évolution, et pour la façon dont nous tirons parti des recherches et connaissances les plus récentes afin d'aider les victimes à surmonter leur traumatisme et à guérir.

Nous investissons dans les programmes importants qui viennent en aide à des milliers de victimes d'actes criminels en Ontario.

Our government's commitment to helping victims of crime is recognized far and wide. We are known for our innovative programs that are always evolving and for taking advantage of the most recent research and knowledge to help victims overcome trauma and strive for healing.

We invest in the delivery of important programs that assist thousands of victims of crime across Ontario. Services are available for all victims of violent crimes, including homicide, assault, domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, hate crimes and human trafficking.

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One example is Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Services, which provides immediate on-site support services 24/7, delivered by 47 community agencies across the province.

Our ministry staff delivers the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, providing information, assistance and support to victims and witnesses of violent crime throughout the criminal court process.

We also offer specialized support and services, such as:

- help for children who may be victims of online sexual abuse;
- counselling support and a dedicated 24-hour crisis information line;
- specialized services and counselling for male survivors of sexual abuse;
- financial and court-based supports to help victims and families of homicide victims participate more fully in the criminal court process;
- assistance with emergency and funeral expenses, as well as crime scene cleanup services; and
- personal safety plans, and, where appropriate, cellular telephones for at-risk eligible victims.

Through our Domestic Violence Court Program, the ministry's victim services staff work together with crown prosecutors, police and others to help us reach our goal of breaking the cycle of violence.

Our government recognizes the unique challenges faced by victims in aboriginal communities. A new, community-based, culturally relevant service supporting victims in remote aboriginal communities in northeast Ontario is now in place in eight communities on the James and Hudson Bay coast.

But even the best program we can develop would achieve little or nothing without the thousands of highly skilled and dedicated people who serve victims of crime on a daily basis. Across Ontario, thousands of volunteers and professionals offer their knowledge, support and advice to victims. They demonstrate compassion and respect. They demonstrate commitment and perseverance, helping victims where and when help is needed most.

Some have been victims of crime themselves and have yet found the strength to work as advocates, raising the profile of victims' issues. In doing so, these courageous people are not only forging a better future for themselves, but for their families, friends and communities for future generations. We owe all of these people a great debt of gratitude.

One way we recognize these people and their tremendous efforts is through the Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction. I will have the honour of presenting these awards to some of these individuals this Thursday. You will be able to welcome this year's recipients when I introduce them here following the presentation ceremony. The awards are a small but important way we can recognize excellence in victims' services.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, our commitment is clear. We will continue our work of improving services for victims of crime, funding effective programs and finding new and innovative ways to help communities across Ontario share new skills and best practices to ensure we remain a leader in the area of victims' services.

En Ontario, nous avons tous la responsabilité individuelle de nous renseigner sur la situation des victimes d'actes criminels et de contribuer à bâtir des

collectivités plus fortes, qui offrent l'aide et le soutien dont ont besoin les victimes d'actes criminels.

Je sais que tous les membres de cette Assemblée continueront à soutenir les victimes d'actes criminels et rendront hommage aux contributions des victimes et de tous ceux et celles qui se dévouent pour les aider, partout dans la province.

Everyone in Ontario has the responsibility to learn about the issues that affect victims of crime and to help build stronger communities that offer the help and support they need.

I know that all members of the House will continue to support victims of crime, and will honour the contributions made across the province by victims and those who work to help them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure to be able to respond on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus on the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week 2014.

In my role, it is obviously a responsibility to look at responding to the Attorney General's statement today in recognition of the beginning of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. First of all, as I think most of us would do when researching, I checked the government website. I wanted to make sure that I understood any new initiatives or anything that was on the website that we should be commenting on today.

Well, I discovered that the government's website has not been updated for three years. The most recent information is from 2011, announcing the sixth annual awareness week. This is actually the ninth year of awareness for victims of crime.

On the website was the message from two ministers ago; this was the welcoming message. He hasn't sat in the House for over a year.

The next thing I did was look through the different aspects of that website, thinking that maybe it was only an oversight at the beginning. I went to something called the "resources for victims" page, and when I got there, the message says, "Page does not exist." I then went to a calendar page for a listing of events for victims. In this 2011 version, it has the list of people who have been nominated for awards. Instead, when you go to the calendar page, it says to check back in 2012.

I was shocked at this, quite frankly. Obviously, in listening to the minister—I would say perhaps she doesn't know about this, but certainly it doesn't fit with the message that I think she would like us to have.

Fortunately, I don't have to rely on the government to provide me with a little background on victims' services, because I remember when the Victims' Bill of Rights was adopted by the Progressive Conservative government in 1996.

In fact, one of the things I particularly remember about that legislative agenda was the fact that York region was one of the first areas to be leaders in victims' services when the Victim/Witness Assistance Program began. I can remember being there for the opening, and I can

remember being invited to other occasions when they celebrated the volunteer component of that program. It was certainly something that, as citizens and as MPPs, we could be very proud of.

Ontario led the way to support victims of crime. I think that it's important to look at some of the parts of that that were included in the original 1996 legislation, some principles that today we would see as something that is hard to imagine has to be a law: The victims are treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their personal dignity and privacy, have access to information concerning services and remedies available to victims, and have access to information about the process of criminal investigations and prosecutions.

1330

I know that just last week the federal government introduced a victims' bill of rights for all of Canada, about which we can certainly be very proud, but I think that we also need to look at our own situation here in Ontario, beyond that of the website.

I have a constituent who has currently been through a horrific experience where she was a passenger. She was very seriously injured and had to be airlifted. The driver died; it was a fatality. She has been asked to come to court five times to deliver a victim impact statement, and five times she has prepared herself for this very difficult emotional experience and has been postponed. We gave a long way to go.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am proud to rise today on behalf of the New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to share my comments regarding the ninth annual Victims of Crime Awareness Week. This year's theme is "Taking Action."

I want to begin with acknowledging the reality that there are far too many victims of crime in our province and, in fact, our country. These victims of crime are faced with various types of crimes that have lasting impacts on themselves and their families; these range from crimes of violence—both physical and sexual—to crimes that involve exploitation.

I want to particularly acknowledge the tremendous work of the extremely dedicated and skilled front-line service providers. They provide assistance on a front-line basis to those victims of crime, and they do so in various programs throughout the province. Some of them fall under the title of victim assistance programs. They are very talented people who are very dedicated to providing services, and I want to acknowledge them as well.

While we look at the impacts on the victims of crime, we must ensure as a government that there are resources provided, to ensure that they are able to recover. That involves rehabilitation in terms of counselling.

It is also important, when we look at victims of crime and our resources that we dedicate to ensuring that they have some level of protection and assistance from the government, that we look at their needs and their desires. Particularly when it comes to the criminal prosecution of offences, many victims of crimes feel alienated. They feel that they don't have a say in the direction that the

prosecution takes. They don't feel that the prosecution is considering what benefits their lives.

It's very important, and I implore this government—and all members of this House—to reflect on the needs of victims of crime in terms of what they see would benefit their own lives, and to ensure that we take into consideration their input when making decisions on what the next steps are for criminal prosecution.

I also think it's of extreme importance that—while we talk about the victims of crime, the resources that they need and that as a government the services that we must provide—we also need to pay some attention to the roots of crime and that, in addressing the roots of crime, we ensure that we make decisions based on evidence.

An emotional reaction to a problem will not solve the problem for the victims, nor will it solve the problem for our society. We have to ensure that the decisions we make to prevent crime, to get to the roots of crime, are based on sound evidence and sound facts. Policies that are developed without facts, based on irrational emotion, will not benefit our societies and will not benefit our victims. We have to ensure that we do that with our system, with our society and with our policies moving forward.

I think it's of crucial importance to acknowledge that many folks who are victims of crime are now becoming victims of exploitation. We've seen very recently that, as our society is aging, seniors are now a growing demographic that are being exploited. Very recently, we saw a very troubling case where a senior was exploited and defrauded of her entire life's savings. Those victims who are most vulnerable in our society need the most protection; moving forward, we realize and we'll see that elders are going to be a portion of our society who are among the highest needs.

In addition to that, we need to look at the realities that, in a society where the victims of crime are predominantly women and children and seniors now, as a growing demographic—the victims of crime are really just a depiction of an imbalance of power. A society where women, children and seniors do not have power, are not afforded opportunities and resources—the reality is that the imbalance of power is demonstrated in the fact that they are overrepresented in terms of being victims of crime. So the deeper question is, what can we do as a society to address the imbalance of power that exists, that is one of the root causes for violence and is one of the root causes for crimes against those vulnerable people? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members of the assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oshawa-Whitby.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas current OHIP legislation and policies prevent Ontario post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 64 from receiving additional one-on-one OHIP-funded physiotherapy; and

“Whereas these post-stroke patients deserve to be rehabilitated to their greatest ability possible to maybe return to work and become provincial income taxpayers again and productive citizens;

“Whereas current OHIP policies prevent Ontarians under age 65 and over the age of 20 from receiving additional OHIP-funded physiotherapy and rehabilitation after their initial stroke treatment; and

“Whereas these OHIP policies are discriminatory in nature, forcing university/college students and other Ontarians to wait until age 65 to receive more OHIP-funded physiotherapy;

“Whereas the lack of post-stroke physiotherapy offered to Ontarians between the ages of 20 and 64 is forcing these people to prematurely cash in their RRSPs and/or sell their houses to raise funds;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, hereby respectfully petition the Ontario Legislature to introduce and pass amending legislation and new regulations to provide OHIP-funded post-stroke physiotherapy and treatment for all qualified post-stroke patients, thereby eliminating the discriminatory nature of current treatment practices.”

I certainly agree with this petition and I'm pleased to affix my signature to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the member; I should have said Whitby–Oshawa, not Oshawa-Whitby, so I got it right.

HYDRO RATES

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

“Whereas the Green Energy Act has driven up the cost of electricity in Ontario due to unrealistic subsidies for certain energy sources, including the world's highest subsidies for solar power; and

“Whereas this cost is passed on to ratepayers through the global adjustment, which can account for almost half of a ratepayer's hydro bill; and

“Whereas the high cost of energy is severely impacting the quality of life of Ontario's residents, especially fixed-income seniors; and

“Whereas it is imperative to remedy Liberal mismanagement in the energy sector by implementing immediate reforms detailed in the Ontario PC white paper Paths to Prosperity—Affordable Energy;

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

“To immediately repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009, and all other statutes that artificially inflate the cost of electricity with the aim of bringing down electricity rates and abolishing expensive surcharges such as the global adjustment and debt retirement charges.”

I fully support this, will affix my name and send it with page Bani to the desk.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Cindy Forster: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula within a fixed funding envelope for children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services;

“Whereas this new ‘fairer’ funding model has resulted in a \$50.6-million funding shortfall for agencies across Ontario for 2013-14 and, due to inadequate funding and the introduction of ‘accountability measures’ which prevent agencies from running deficits, agencies will be forced to balance budgets by cutting staff and services;

“Whereas the \$2.3-million provincial funding shortfall for Family and Children's Services Niagara for 2013 alone has led to the recent announcement of the closure of the Regional Adolescent Centre, a youth home and treatment centre for youth who need supports to stabilize their situation to help them make successful transition back to the community, a foster family, their family of origin or independent living;

“Whereas the closure of the Regional Adolescent Centre will force a situation in which there will be fewer beds for kids in need of specialized supports in the community, foster parents will not have access to the RAC for respite care, kids in treatment currently may be required to go out of the community to receive supports and over 40 workers will lose their jobs;

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

“That the Ontario government fund the \$50.6-million funding shortfall, fix the funding formula to ensure that agencies can maintain services including prevention services, and put an immediate halt to the closure of the Regional Adolescent Centre in Welland and other staffing cuts that hurt services.”

I support this petition and affix my signature.

1340

FISHING REGULATIONS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary is printed each year by the Ministry of Natural Resources and distributed to recreational fishermen throughout the province to inform them of all the relevant seasons, limits, licence requirements and other regulations; and

“Whereas this valuable document is readily available for anglers to keep in their residence, cottage, truck, boat, trailer or on their person to be fully informed of the current fishing regulations; and

“Whereas the MNR has recently and abruptly drastically reduced the distribution of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary such that even major licence issuers and

large fishing retailers are limited to one case of regulations per outlet; and

“Whereas anglers do not always have access to the Internet to view online regulations while travelling or in” more “remote areas;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately return the production of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary to previous years’ quantities such that all anglers have access to a copy and to distribute them accordingly.”

I affix my signature in full support.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Todd Smith: I’m presenting this on behalf of Barry Gaebel of the Bancroft area, who is living with IPF.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Esbriet for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a rare, progressive and fatal disease characterized by scarring of the lungs; and

“Whereas Esbriet, the first and only approved medication in Canada for the treatment of IPF, has been shown to slow disease progression and to decrease the decline in lung function; and

“Whereas the lack of public funding for Esbriet is especially devastating for seniors with IPF who rely exclusively on the provincial drug program for access to medications;

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

“Immediately provide Esbriet as a choice to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding.”

I support this petition and will sign it and send it to the table.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize

testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature, and send it to the table with Callista.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

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

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services’ Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I fully support this and will send it with a great page from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: Calvin Devries.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Todd Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean Program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emissions control technologies; and

“Whereas, from 1999 to 2010, the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test no longer assesses tailpipe emissions, but instead scans the on-board diagnostics systems of vehicles, which already perform a series of continuous and periodic emissions checks; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘fails’, which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I agree with this and will send it to the table with page Mira.

USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I need to ask the member for Etobicoke North if his petition has been certified by the table.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I do thank you, Speaker, for not only the recognition, but I am very pleased to certify that my petition has been duly recognized, honoured and, I think, even endorsed by—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize, then, the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you. I have a petition here, Speaker, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas virtually all Legislatures in Canada have fully embraced digital technologies;

“Whereas digital communications are now essential for members of Parliament to conduct their business, correspond with constituents, respond to stakeholders, stay in touch with staff, store data and information securely, keep ahead of the news cycle, and to remain current;

“Whereas progressive record-keeping relies on cloud technology, remote access, real-time updates, multiple-point data entry and broadband, wireless and satellite technologies;

“Whereas as there is more to full exploitation of technology than having an email address;

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario has been considering the value, utility and usage of digital devices within the legislative precinct and within the chamber of Parliament itself for several months;

“Whereas this consideration of digital empowerment of members continues to be unresolved, on hold, under consideration and the subject of repeated temporizing correspondence between decision-makers and interested parties;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully request all various decision-makers of the assembly and government to fully embrace digital technologies, empower members, acquire the optimal Android and Apple devices, maximize the many technology offerings, and orchestrate a much-needed modernization of the conduct of parliamentary

business for the eventual benefit of the people of Ontario.”

I fully agree with this highly certified and endorsed petition, Speaker, and send it to you via page Eli.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of Mr. Jim McEwen, who is a stroke-suffering patient, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas current OHIP legislation and policies prevent Ontario post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 64 from receiving additional one-on-one OHIP-funded physiotherapy; and

“Whereas these post-stroke patients deserve to be rehabilitated to their greatest ability possible to maybe return to work and become provincial income taxpayers again and productive citizens;

“Whereas current OHIP policies prevent Ontarians under age 65 and over the age of 20 from receiving additional OHIP-funded physiotherapy and rehabilitation after their initial stroke treatment; and

“Whereas these OHIP policies are discriminatory in nature, forcing university/college students and other Ontarians to wait until age 65 to receive more OHIP-funded physiotherapy;

“Whereas the lack of post-stroke physiotherapy offered to Ontarians between the ages of 20 and 64 is forcing these people to prematurely cash in their RRSPs and/or sell their houses to raise funds” to provide the service themselves;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, hereby respectfully petition the Ontario Legislature to introduce and pass amending legislation and new regulations to provide OHIP-funded, post-stroke physiotherapy and treatment for all qualified post-stroke patients, thereby eliminating the discriminatory nature of current treatment practices.”

I’m pleased to sign and support and present it to Nusaybah.

RANKED BALLOTING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario”—I have a petition:

“Whereas, on June 11, 2013, Toronto city council passed a motion requesting a ranked ballot for municipal elections; and

“Whereas Bill 166 will strengthen local democracy within the city of Toronto;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 166, the Toronto Ranked Ballot Elections Act, 2014, which was introduced by Mitzie Hunter, MPP (Scarborough–Guildwood) and passed second reading on March 6, 2014.”

I will sign this petition and give it to page Bani.

1350

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

“That the Liberal government support” initiatives by MPP Lisa Thompson and “call for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third-party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I actually agree with this petition, affix my signature and I’ll send it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING ACT, 2014LOI DE 2014 SUR LA NÉGOCIATION
COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS
SCOLAIRES

Mrs. Sandals moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario’s school system / Projet de loi 122, Loi concernant la négociation collective dans le système scolaire de l’Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Education to lead off the debate.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I’m proud to stand in the House today to speak in support of Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014. Our government rises in favour of this bill that will, if passed, provide an innovative, made-in-Ontario approach to collective

bargaining in the school board sector. It would establish an improved legal framework for conducting negotiations, and it would ensure that we have a clearer process with more clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all participants involved throughout the collective bargaining process. It would also build on our commitment to restore and maintain strong relationships with our education partners and, above all, to move forward.

Since I was first appointed Minister of Education, Speaker, this has been my number one priority: Namely, to restore the relationships we have with our education sector partners and build on the success of our world-class education system.

This important bill is a critical next step in the great progress we have already made. With a clearer and more consistent labour framework in place, we will have a process that works for all participants involved. That is why we worked so closely with stakeholders to develop this necessary legislation and to pass a number of amendments through committee. Feedback from our education sector partners was instrumental during this legislative committee process.

I want to thank my parliamentary assistant, Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scarborough–Rouge River—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: A good member.

Hon. Liz Sandals: A very good member—for his commitment and dedication during the legislative committee process and for moving this important legislation forward. I also want to thank members of this House who participated in the committee process and brought their voices to this discussion. I want to thank my critics, and in particular I want to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his co-operation in sorting out all the amendments so effectively.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Also a good member.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Also a good member.

During the time between introduction of the legislation and the committee process, our education sector partners asked for amendments. Speaker, we listened and responded to our partners. Their direct input resulted in a revised Bill 122 that would, once negotiations begin, ensure a fair and effective collective bargaining process for everyone involved. That’s why the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act is necessary. This important legislation would put a clearer and more consistent framework in place. It would enshrine the crown’s duty to bargain in good faith, and it would formalize a process that has been, to date, informal and voluntary. Simply put, the current informal, voluntary process is outdated. It does not reflect today’s complexities and realities, and our education system needs an improved model for collective bargaining. For years, the province has been the sole funder of the education system but without a formal, legally enshrined role during negotiations. This arrangement no longer makes sense. It is not sustainable, and frankly, it needs to change.

At one time, this ad hoc process worked: when investments in education were increasing. But we are currently facing fiscal restraints, and we need a process that can

weather the significant challenges of our current economic climate. That is why we need this groundbreaking legislation. It will replace a voluntary process with a clear legal framework and with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all parties during negotiations. It will also make it mandatory for the government, as the funder of public education in Ontario, to have a prescribed role where it participates at every central table during collective bargaining.

It is also essential that we pass Bill 122 quickly, since virtually all collective agreements in the education sector expire in August of this year. The next round of bargaining is upon us, and a model that stipulates the government's role at the central table will be of vital importance.

Just as importantly, Bill 122 sets out the roles of the trustees' associations representing school boards as employer bargaining agencies and provincial unions representing employees as their bargaining agencies.

Before I go any further, I want to be clear about our efforts to consult on this legislation and work together with our education sector partners. As I mentioned before, we worked closely and diligently with stakeholders to develop this legislation and make amendments. We received invaluable feedback on this bill once it was tabled. Through the legislative committee process, this input from the sector was used to fine-tune the legislation in the true spirit of collegiality and collaboration.

I would like to recognize the feedback we received and explain how we have amended this groundbreaking bill. The proposed bill completed clause-by-clause consideration on April 2, and the following amendments have now been included. It clarifies the crown's roles and obligations in bargaining at a central table. It makes it mandatory for the crown to participate in collective bargaining at every central table. It makes it clear that the duties as well as the rights and privileges of the crown would be enforceable at the Ontario Labour Relations Board, including a duty to bargain in good faith. It removes the minister's unilateral discretion to reserve matters to the central table.

We are proud that, in working with our partners, we have developed what would be a made-in-Ontario legislative model. In other words, it is a framework that incorporates invaluable feedback and is the result of constant dialogue to create a guide for collective bargaining in the sector.

Another amendment gives the government and trustee associations the duty to co-operate with each other when preparing for and conducting central bargaining. Again, co-operation and collaboration is a hallmark of this legislation.

Another important set of amendments concerns bargaining for support staff unions. The amendments give any single support staff union that represents 15 support staff units or more the right to access a central table, provided that it represents a double two-thirds majority. That is to say, the union must represent at least two thirds

of all of its bargaining units and two thirds of all employees in all of its bargaining units at the central table.

As you can tell, I've got a cold.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Do you want me to continue?

Hon. Liz Sandals: No, I'll keep going for a few minutes. But if I suddenly hand off sharing my time with my colleague here, you'll know what has happened.

1400

Interjections.

Hon. Liz Sandals: He was offering medical help. If you can make the cold go away, that would be wonderful.

Regarding French-language teachers: Another amendment establishes a single central table for French-language teachers, with both French public and French Catholic boards at the same table.

Another key piece that came out of the committee process, resulting in an important amendment, concerns the scope of central bargaining. I want to draw particular attention to this change, which has been amended to allow parties at the central table, along with the government, to freely negotiate issues that will be bargained centrally. It does so by removing the Minister of Education's unilateral discretion to reserve matters to the central table. This is something that we heard during consultations from stakeholders, and we listened.

Because of this, a further amendment will improve and expedite the process to resolve disputes over what matters are negotiated at the central table versus the local tables. This change prohibits strikes or lockouts related to disputes over the central and local split of issues, but the central parties and the government would then be able to raise any such disputes over which issues are at the central table with the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

This brings me to another key amendment, which relates to the terms of any negotiated settlement. The amendment establishes a three-year standardized term for collective agreements in the education sector; however, it also allows the Minister of Education to vary the term from two years to four years, but only after consulting with the central parties across the sector.

By maintaining consistent lengths for collective agreements, we can ensure orderly bargaining at the central tables; common end dates for agreements; and stability for the education sector in between bargaining rounds. Again, this will help maintain education sector peace in between the actual collective bargaining rounds.

Finally, we also listened to our stakeholders and amended the section related to the arbitration of central grievances. This amendment allows for full remedial authority by a central grievance arbitrator. At the same time, this allows for local arbitration and settlements to continue to resolve local disputes that involve central terms. This amendment shows that the government is committed to creating an efficient and effective procedure for the arbitration of central grievances.

Speaker, as you can see, the feedback from our education partners has been respected, and it is reflected in this bill through these amendments. This shows that

we listened and responded in a positive, respectful way. Again, we are committed to a collaborative process where we have the duty to bargain in good faith. This will ensure that all parties involved in collective bargaining can work together, focus on our shared goals of higher levels of student achievement and student well-being, and increase public confidence in publicly funded education.

Now that I have demonstrated how we have fine-tuned this bill with the help of stakeholders, I would also like to emphasize why this legislation is so important. If passed, this framework for labour negotiations would establish two processes for negotiations: central tables for significant province-wide issues, and local tables to address local issues. Negotiations would take place at each level, guaranteeing that all issues, whether large or small, would be discussed in a consistent and focused way.

At central tables, the government and provincial trustees' associations would bargain in concert together. Employees would be represented, of course, by teacher federations or education sector worker unions. Similarly, the legislation respects local bargaining, where local issues would continue to be bargained by local school boards and local employee representatives.

Finally, collective agreements would include the provisions of the central agreements for the central terms combined with the local agreements for the local terms. Again, this would, for the first time in Ontario, enshrine a legally defined, mandatory role for government at central tables.

One of the more groundbreaking parts of this legislation is three-way ratification for central bargaining. In other words, all three participants—the government, the trustees' associations, and the teacher federations or the education worker unions, as the case may be—have to agree to the central settlement; that is, each of the three parties has to agree to ratify the central settlement. This is important to note because without this consensus of all three parties, no central settlement can be reached. Speaker, we can confidently call this a made-in-Ontario approach to collective bargaining. No other province quite has this approach to three-way ratification, although many provinces do, in fact, have central bargaining.

This innovative legislation shows that we heard our education partners who asked for more clarity, more consistency and more accountability during the collective bargaining process, and that is what we, indeed, are delivering with this legislation.

Speaker, increased accountability will extend beyond the next round of negotiations. That is because the government is committed to a review with our partners after the next round of collective bargaining. This reflects our willingness to engage in collective problem-solving, since any new legislation—when you have that, you always have a bit of a learning curve. So we understand that we may need to fine-tune some aspects of the legislation. We recognize there may be some issues that would need to be looked at down the road or require further clarification.

The success of this new framework is very important to our government. If this legislation passes, we will be at the central table, and we will see first-hand what is working and what can be tweaked in the future, if necessary, to make it even better.

Speaker, through much debate in this House over many months, I've explained why this legislation is so necessary. As I mentioned, the previous process for collective bargaining was voluntary and created major challenges. We need a new model whereby everyone has a more clearly defined role at a centralized table and where the parties and the crown have a duty to bargain in good faith.

We are also faced with fiscal realities. School boards no longer have taxation powers, and we are in a period when education investments are not increasing dramatically, as they did in the past.

So we need a new framework that allows us to tackle these challenges with a creative and collaborative approach.

Speaker, as I've said, the next round of bargaining is just around the corner. Virtually all contracts in the education sector expire at the end of this August. That means the collective bargaining process needs to begin very soon.

In light of this tight time frame, it is imperative that this House pass the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act and that we do so quickly. All participants at the new centralized bargaining table will need sufficient lead time to help implement the provisions in this bill. That will be essential to the success of this groundbreaking legislation. As such, I urge all MPPs in this House to rise and support this bill. By passing this important legislation, we can put in place a made-in-Ontario approach to guide collective bargaining in the education sector.

It's clear that we need a collective bargaining process that ensures all participants have clearer roles and responsibilities. In this regard, we do need the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, and it's in everyone's best interests that we pass this legislation and that we are properly prepared to enter into the next round of collective bargaining; because ultimately, our ability to enter into collective bargaining is what determines our ability to be in classrooms, teaching our children.

1410

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

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus to discuss this very important piece of legislation. I do want to begin my remarks by perhaps commenting on some of the things the minister has stated in her remarks.

The first thing I would say is that her desire is to pass this legislation quickly. Certainly, the speed at which we will be passing this legislation is lightning speed. We are literally at the final hour of debating this bill, and each party has only 20 minutes to speak to this particular piece of legislation. We aren't even able to have some questions and comments where we can come back to debate

these very issues that are important to the strength of our education system.

I sat and listened to the minister with interest to see what she would have to say. I have to say that her presentation was highly technical. She talked about negotiations. She talked about process. What I am concerned about is that she failed to talk about how all this translates to moms and dads and their kids, right across the province of Ontario. They want to know what this bill means to them. They want to know what's in it for them.

Each and every day I stand in this Legislature and listen to this government talk about education. It's evident and very clear that when they talk about partners of education, they're talking about the teacher federations; they're talking about the school boards; they're talking about certain interest groups. They rarely ever talk about parents and students being partners in our education system, and I think that is a crying shame. That should be our primary focus.

I listened to the minister talk, and in her initial comments she said that when she became the Minister of Education, her first priority in her job was to repair the relationships that had been battered by that government. That was her first priority: repairing the relationships with the teacher federations and the school boards.

I would suggest that the Minister of Education in the province of Ontario should have a different first priority. The first priority of the Minister of Education should be the success of our students. It should be about seeing our students succeed. That should be the first focus of a Minister of Education in the province of Ontario. Yet all we heard in that 20 minutes—less than 20 minutes—that the minister chose to take on debate of Bill 122 was simply about repairing relationships and not about student success.

I have been the education critic here in this Legislature for the Ontario PC caucus since the beginning of October. We have seen three pieces of legislation in education debated in this Legislature. Not one of them talks about improving the success of our students, and I think that's a crying shame.

We're moms and dads in this Legislature. We're grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles. We have or we know children who are in the education system. I know from our side, in the PC caucus, we have very young children with very young families, and we're very proud of that. For many families, particularly families of people around my age and the age of my peers, education is an important issue. They want to know that when they elect legislators to this place, they'll be able to talk about the future success of our education system. In reality, we have three pieces of legislation with respect to education, and not one of them—not one of them—talks about the strength and success of our students. Student achievement should be number one.

We should be talking about how to fix our declining math achievement in our schools. When PISA and TIMSS international comparisons show Ontario students on the decline, it gives rise for the education critic to say

that we need to do something about that. Yet we're not talking about that in this Legislature. We see that our students, once they graduate from our high schools, go on to college and university—we see their achievement and they're struggling in mathematics, but we're not doing anything in this Legislature to talk about how we can improve the achievement of our students in mathematics and even in other subject areas.

I submit that we should be talking about education, and I'm very happy and excited to be doing that at every given stage. In fact, I was so excited to talk about this bill that I think I've spoken about this bill more than any other person in this Legislature, because it's important to get the process right. It's important to give rise to concerns that parents and kids have about their school system and bring those concerns to this Legislature. I find it completely amazing that we are talking about a bill that sets up a collective bargaining process, that talks about how we are going to engage in negotiation and education, yet when we come forward with a couple of ideas that we wanted to see in this piece of legislation, Bill 122, the phone never rang. No one wanted to negotiate. No one wanted to hear our concerns. We kept raising them over and over and over again.

I want to remind members of this Legislature that we started this journey way back in October. October 22, 2013, is when first reading of this legislation was in this place. We stated then, and we continue to state now, that we were interested in seeing how we can have an education system that is responsive to the desires of parents and their kids. We initiated a discussion on regulation 274, which is a regulation that governs how teachers are hired in the province of Ontario. We wanted to talk about it. It was an item of discussion that we were very interested in having. We've heard from principals and from parents that the system needed to change, that it needed to improve. If we could use this opportunity in Bill 122 to address those concerns, we were going to take it. I had written to the minister. I had asked questions in question period to the minister. Our response simply fell on deaf ears—well, our request fell on deaf ears; there wasn't really a response to be discussed.

We then went through a process of public hearings after the government thought this massive piece of legislation was so important that they actually invoked closure at second reading to get this bill into committee. We then listened in public hearings where the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association wanted to talk about how we can ensure that extracurricular activities would be part of our school system and a part of the educational experience of our students. I wasn't expecting the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association to bring that issue to the table, but they did. A "partner in education" made a presentation that articulated a position on how we can guarantee extracurricular activities in our schools.

In listening to that idea come up in public hearings, we thought it was our responsibility to take that cause up, because we on this side of the Legislature—and I'm

pretty sure that when this was going on in ridings right across the province one year ago, we heard from parents then, and we're continuing to hear from parents now, that this was such a vital and important issue that we should not let it go. Moms and dads started emailing, telling us their child was in a position where they were going to be competing in their sports or in their arts programs come the fall. Knowing full well a new collective bargaining season was upon us, they wanted to make sure that we were able to protect those extracurricular activities so their children could have an opportunity to be assessed by potential scouts, whether that's in sports like football, basketball or volleyball. The prospect of losing that final season was so detrimental to so many families. I would suggest that we are almost at a position where we can forecast into the future that there will be some challenges in the next round of negotiation. All that these moms, dads and students wanted was an assurance that we would do our utmost to make sure that extracurricular activities would be in our schools.

We demanded that; we talked about it. We reminded people that we were interested in moving this bill forward. I can say on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus that I think it's a good thing to have a process that is outlined, that is written out, that is discussed, that is debated amongst partners in the negotiation process. There is some merit to doing this. I'm not going to disagree. But when it comes time to standing up for parents and their kids, we need to have a serious conversation about doing that. The problem is that even though we made that case and we pled and pled and pled about using this opportunity to provide some assurance to parents, to provide some assurance to their kids that their extracurricular activities were going to remain in our schools, the government not only failed to listen but they ultimately decided to shut us down, to close debate, to allocate us out of our time so we could no longer make that point.

1420

I say that with a lot of concern, because there wasn't a lot of debate. Closure happened at second reading—three hours of public hearings, five minutes per presentation at committee, with three minutes per party in questions and answers at committee. One full day—only three hours in total—was devoted to public hearings on this vital piece of legislation. We've not seen too many bills this long, actually, in this Legislature. This is a substantive piece of legislation, yet nobody had the willingness, other than the Ontario PC caucus, to actually talk about this bill and to talk about what we can do for parents. I find that most troubling: that, despite the fact that so many people are concerned about our education system, when it comes time to talk about it in this Legislature, the government's response is to shut down, to end debate and to make sure that we don't hear the voices that need to be heard. I completely reject that. I would say with a degree of confidence that when we talk about education, parents and students will always have friends in the Ontario PC caucus.

I want to say this too: that when it comes to our teachers—we in the Ontario PC caucus believe we have

great teachers in the province of Ontario. We think that part of the strength of our great education system is the fact that the people teaching our children are of high quality. We want to assure teachers that we believe that we have a good resource that we like to promote. But that doesn't mean that, on every issue that we debate in this Legislature, we're going to agree. As I've stated with our friends that are teachers, all I'm interested in is the success of our students—to enrich their educational experience. Every teacher that I talk to, remarkably, believes the same thing. They want to see their kids succeed. They take their children, their students, much like they take their own kids in wanting to see them thrive in a nurturing environment—and, like the minister, my voice is going as well.

That doesn't mean that on every issue we are going to agree. I believe it is their job to teach our students. It's their federation's job to represent the interests of teachers. But it is our job as legislators to represent the interests of parents. It's our job to bring their voice to light. Usually, we're going to agree. But there are going to be occasions where we don't agree. I think that's fine. I actually think that's healthy. They're doing their job and we are doing ours. But to completely shut out those voices in a process so important as this, I find to be completely unacceptable. I think that when we look at the system before us, with the bill and legislation that we see, we could have done more to strengthen this bill than actually appears in this legislation. But when we received notice of this time allocation motion, some of the other amendments that we were seeking weren't able to make the floor.

You see, what this time allocation motion had done was to say that they weren't going to accept any other amendments if they weren't submitted from a week before. So if you hadn't put your amendments in, you weren't going to be able to debate them. Our approach on this was to say to the government that we had one particular ask, one particular request, and that we were going to withhold our other amendments just to make the process go a little quicker.

I think we should have a serious sunset clause provision in this legislation that says that after this round of negotiations is completed, we should relook, review, go back to the drawing board if necessary. I appreciate the minister commenting on that today, that indeed she would be open to having such a review process, but I think it would have been more secure if we had an automatic review provision that is stringent, that is robust, that we can go back to a year from now, once the next round of negotiations is finished. I think it would be important to have those discussions and to have that reassurance, not just from the government's perspective but also from the perspective of the other parties.

Again, we weren't able to have those discussions. We were looking at these provisions with extracurricular activities with a degree of sincerity. Again, we heard from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association that this was something that they wanted. We supported that idea because parents told us—but I want to say

something also on this particular point, because what we were suggesting wasn't completely a novel idea; it wasn't something that we came up with on our own. In fact, the Ontario Labour Relations Board said much the same thing that we are saying with respect to extra-curricular activities and the withdrawal of those activities in and for our schools.

It becomes all too convenient, as the Ontario Labour Relations Board suggested, for people to say, "We're just going to withdraw voluntary activities," because you know those voluntary activities, those sports clubs, those debate clubs, those music programs, those drama clubs, those tutoring supports, those parent-teacher interviews and communication with parents? Those extra things are vital to the education experience for kids, and it's too convenient to yank those very important things off in a job action, because they do affect, they do motivate, they do have a serious impact on kids. But, you know, the people who are withdrawing those services still have a job to go to and still have a paycheque to collect. So the Ontario Labour Relations Board suggested that it's too difficult to distinguish between what is a mandatory and what is a voluntary task, and that any withdrawal of an activity should be considered a withdrawal that is a strike, which is something that we were saying, something we were suggesting. Again, it fell on deaf ears.

I have to say with a degree of sincerity that I become very concerned when that request that we were making simply is not acted upon, that draconian measures have to be implemented to restrict the kind of debate that we're having on this legislation because a provision that we were wishing to include that is based on Ontario Labour Relations Board rulings, that was based on the recommendations of a partner in our education system, is simply withdrawn. It's not acted upon—yet these very serious limitations to debate ensue.

I would say to our parents and our students that we won't forget, that we will continue to fight for a better education system, that we will continue to make the points we need to make in order to get to where we need to be. I want to say to parents and students that our number one focus is the success of our students. I want to see achievement go up, not down. I'm disappointed when our system has achievement that is going down further below what we had in 2003, when we left office. I can't understand how anybody would accept declining achievement as a success. Our failure to discuss these very important, vital matters in this Legislature is, I think, frankly, a shame.

1430

I want to say to parents and students that we support you.

I want to thank our teachers and our education partners for the good work that they're doing in nurturing our children.

I hope, in the future, once we have an education bill that's presented to this Legislature, that members aren't afraid to debate it and aren't afraid to talk about how we can improve the success of our students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

Applause.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the Minister of the Environment for his unbridled enthusiasm when I rise to speak.

Speaker, I'm going to talk about this bill in two sections today. First, I want to talk a bit about the historical context, and secondly, I want to talk about the substance of the bill itself.

Before I start, I want to note that there are secondary school teachers here today from OSSTF district 12 and representatives of the francophone teachers, AEFO.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Bonjour.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Bonjour.

Speaker, in the summer of 2012, the Liberal government introduced Bill 115, the so-called Putting Students First Act. It should have been called the "creating conflict in our schools act." It was supported by the Conservatives. It set forth a time that caused a great deal of anguish for students, for parents, for families across Ontario, and, frankly, the women and men we depend on to look after our students day in and day out, to educate them, to make sure they're safe, to attend to their needs.

I take issue with the comments of the Conservative critic on this matter. I think that ensuring that we have good relations with those who actually do the work in our schools is important to the success of students. A demoralized workforce, a workforce that feels that it is being demonized, is a workforce that's going to find it very difficult to deliver what our children need to have delivered to them.

Speaker, I need to repeat what I said earlier about Bill 115, because it is such a massive factor in shaping the current state of mind of those involved in the education system—and the impact of that bill as it echoes through this society. Speaking about Bill 115, I have said previously:

"The bill goes well beyond any prior attempt by the provincial government to constrain collective bargaining. The authority given to the minister and cabinet effectively enables them to control both the process of bargaining and the results of bargaining, including the right to strike or lock out, and imposing collective agreements or their forms without any accountability to the Legislature. So all of you in here who are going to get a chance to vote know that you are delegating huge power to the cabinet. We are being asked to sign a very big blank cheque. So ask yourselves: Do you trust this cabinet with that blank cheque? I ask the Conservatives: Do you trust this government, this cabinet, with that blank cheque?" In fact, they did. "Aside from sitting ministers who would like to be seen well by their Premier, is there anyone else in this room who thinks that giving the Premier a blank cheque is a good idea? I don't.

"The act interferes with the collective bargaining process set out under the Labour Relations Act on signifi-

cant matters, such as wages and sick leave. It violates rights to freedom of association under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

“The act seeks to shield the actions of cabinet from any review by the courts, the labour board or boards of arbitration, in contravention of a legal concept as basic as the rule of law.

“It’s interesting that the Labour Relations Board and any other arbitrators are prohibited from either inquiring into or making decisions about the constitutionality of the act or whether the act is in conflict with the Human Rights Code.

“I have to say, this is pretty thorough. It makes sure that all kinds of legal structures and protections are stripped away. It didn’t leave anything to chance. If there’s a violation of the Human Rights Code, that’s set aside. If there are problems with the law governing relations between employers and employees, those protections are stripped away.

“There’s an arbitrator who may look at this, do an assessment and conclude there are fundamental problems. That arbitrator can have no impact on the agreement.

“The province can use the Labour Relations Board to enforce their agreement, but employees can’t use that same mechanism to protect themselves.

“Speaker, you know as well as I that if you’re in a situation where the law can only be used to beat someone down, and no one can use the law to protect themselves, you’ve diminished the law, you’ve diminished the authority of law, and you’ve diminished the respect for the law, because it has become one-sided. That’s what is happening here.

“I quote extensively because our experience with Bill 115” was so searing for people across this province. “For every member in this chamber, for families across Ontario, for teachers and education workers trying to make sense of a world that, to them, had been turned upside down, it was an experience that we do not want to go through again.”

I have to say that this bill before us today will not prevent a repetition of the experience with Bill 115. “If a government is willing to restrict the use of the Human Rights Code or the labour board for anyone to protect themselves but ensures those mechanisms can be used on the part of the government,” when a government decides to ignore the Charter of Rights and throw fairness out the window, then a bill “that formalizes a bargaining framework is not going to stop a repeat of the offence in future.”

Speaker, Bill 122 will provide some useful tools and structures for the people of this province, but it will not prevent a repetition of Bill 115. That has to be clear in everyone’s mind.

With regard to the substance of this bill itself, we all know that labour legislation is crucial to the stability of our education system. It needs to be based on fairness and have support from stakeholders in order to function effectively.

When Bill 122 was first introduced, stakeholders were very concerned about its impact. I had the opportunity to talk to a broad range of people, starting in the summer of 2012. I heard from teachers across Ontario. I had the opportunity to talk to a number of parents. I had the opportunity to talk to people who work in our schools supporting those teachers.

Over the past several months, we in the NDP have worked closely with stakeholders and, together, we were able to press the government to amend this bill significantly. We made important changes to this bill. It is not perfect; that is clear. But it is a better piece of legislation now, and we will be supporting it in third reading.

We drafted 48 amendments. We were able to press the government to accept 21 amendments in total to their own bill, including amendments moved by our caucus. That, in our opinion, is a substantial win for the people of this province and the stakeholders in the education system. I think it’s another example of how the NDP has been able to get results for people and hold the government accountable.

While the Tories sat on the sidelines and obstructed the committee’s work, we proposed solutions that work for the children and families of Ontario and our partners in education. I need to take issue with some words from my honourable colleague from Cambridge, the education critic for the Progressive Conservative Party. He said that no one would talk about this bill. In fact, I gave a one-hour leadoff. My colleagues had their opportunity to speak about the bill. We indeed did debate this bill.

The Progressive Conservatives talk about the fact that they weren’t able to introduce amendments because of time allocation. Speaker, I note that when it came time to file amendments, we had filed amendments; the government had filed amendments. The opposition had filed two. If there were extensive changes, it was incumbent upon them to actually step up to the plate, file them and move things forward. That was not going on, Speaker. That was not going on.

Speaker, this act—an overview—changes the collective bargaining framework by formalizing central and local collective bargaining. It mandates a system of central bargaining on fiscal matters and key matters of provincial education policy. The central table is a tripartite structure, but the crown has a slightly different status than the other two parties. Local tables maintain the traditional two-part structure.

This bill will have an important impact on all of the stakeholders in the education system. Students and their families, school boards, teachers, support staff—all are going to be affected by the structure that’s being put in place.

1440

When we talked to stakeholders initially, they were concerned about the government’s status as a non-party to the negotiations. They were concerned that the arbitration criteria were very explicit on considering the ability of the employer to pay, but there was no mention of fair remuneration or decent working conditions. Stakeholders

were concerned that the scope of ministerial ability to reserve items for the central table was extremely large. The term of collective agreements gave the government the ability to define the length of the term rather than negotiate it; that was a concern. The timelines for serving notice to bargain, at 270 days, was seen as being too long. Stakeholders pressed on that, we pressed on that; the government moved on that. The process and implications for central grievance arbitration were unclear in the act as originally introduced. The threshold to represent support workers at a central table was concerning to some stakeholders, as was their ability to in fact demand to be able to be part of the central process. Others told us that the ratification process was unclear.

We drafted approximately 50 amendments, 48 or 50 amendments, based on the feedback we heard from those stakeholders. We used those amendments to increase pressure on the government to change this bill to a form that would make sense for everyone who was going to be part of the bargaining process and to ensure that this bill, to the extent it was possible to do so, would work for everyone.

I have made many criticisms; I do need to give some thanks. I want to thank teachers and education workers who came to us, spoke with us, debated with us; and when we had questions, were extraordinarily rapid in responding.

I want to thank Ministry of Education staff who very directly answered questions that we had, questions that allowed us to move forward. I have to say that the minister's political staff and the minister herself were business-like in their dealings with us. We may disagree, but they were able to work in a way that was needed to get through legislation that people in this province need to have gotten through.

I have to say, there were some things that were very important for us to move forward. It was important to clarify that the crown has to abide by its duties. I'm very pleased that the minister, earlier, made it quite clear that the spirit and intent of this legislation is that this government has to participate and bargain in good faith in the central bargaining; that was a very important consideration for us. I'm very pleased to hear her say that, and I'm very pleased to have seen the changes in the bill that bring that into effect.

We were concerned that school boards and their spinoffs, or their collaborations with other school boards, can be considered under the Labour Relations Act as one employer entity. That was a substantial consideration for us. That amendment was made.

We were concerned that the role of the crown be clarified so that its participation in negotiations is not an entitlement of the crown, but rather required of the crown. That was a substantial and useful amendment.

School boards received assurance that they'll have full co-operation in good faith from the crown during the period in preparation for and while conducting bargaining. School boards face a very difficult political terrain. Ensuring that they are dealt with with respect by the

provincial government was important to have included in this legislation.

It was important to secure the rights of non-teacher bargaining units to be designated as the employee bargaining agencies during specific rounds of collective bargaining. In fact, based on requests from education workers, we were able to craft a structure within which support from at least 15 bargaining units representing at least two thirds of the total bargaining units and two thirds of the employees represented by the union would be required to ensure that there was a place at the bargaining table for non-teacher federations or unions.

The legislation was also clarified to ensure that a council of trade unions could be designated as the employee bargaining agency for a central table for the smaller bargaining units.

These were substantial changes, advances in the bill, which allow it to function in a way that I believe will better serve the interests of the people of this province.

We were able to press for and ensure that ratification procedures and strike vote procedures are determined by the labour organizations in accordance with the Labour Relations Act, and not imposed upon employees.

The government is required to conduct greater consultation with affected stakeholders prior to setting the operative term of the collective agreement.

The role of the Labour Relations Board is clarified regarding matters for central bargaining and local bargaining, and to ensure that denominational rights and privileges are not infringed upon.

We were pleased that we were able to make those advances. Again, the stakeholders deserve credit for the work that they did, making sure there was clarity in the message they brought to the government and to us, and their ability to mobilize themselves to make sure their message got through. We were pleased to work with them.

There was one area where we did not get the support of the government, and that was with regard to section 37 of the bill, which states that an arbitrator shall resolve disputes by taking into consideration:

—school boards' ability to pay;

—the extent to which services may have to be reduced, in light of the resolution, if taxation levels are not increased;

—“the economic situation in Ontario;”

—a comparison of “comparable employees in the public and private sectors;” and

—“the school boards' ability to attract and retain qualified employees.”

Frankly, we believe that those criteria should have been struck out or at least amended to also require the arbitrator to take into consideration “the need to establish compensation and other terms and conditions of employment that are fair and reasonable in relation to the qualifications required, the responsibility assumed and the nature of the work performed.” We believe that our proposal was very reasonable and fair, and simply asked that the work performed by teachers and education

workers be taken into consideration when an arbitrator makes a decision. It is unfortunate, in my mind, that the PCs and the Liberals joined together to defeat that amendment put forward by us. That is regrettable.

Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to address this matter this afternoon. I look forward to a vote on this bill. I look forward to addressing the issues around education that we, in Ontario, have to come to grips with.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 1, 2014, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. Sandals has moved third reading of Bill 122. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice from the chief government whip asking that the vote be deferred until tomorrow at the time of deferred votes. Thank you very much.

Third reading vote deferred.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2014
LOI DE 2014 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 18, 2014, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / *Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to advise the House that when we last debated this motion, the member for London–Fanshawe had the floor. I am pleased to recognize the member for London–Fanshawe.

1450

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you so much. It certainly is a privilege to speak on Bill 21, the home caregiver leave act. I have spoken to it earlier, and I think I have the rest of my speech to do. When I was speaking before, it was with regard to the fact that this is at third reading. The government was—I'm a little out of breath. I ran up the stairs.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Have a glass of water.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes. Water, please.

We were discussing the fact that the government was pushing the opposition members here to pass this bill quickly. Everybody was in agreement. I might see some familiar faces here from the Heart and Stroke Foundation—

Interjection: Cancer.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Oh. Cancer. They are very interested in making sure that this bill does see the end of the day in a positive light and that we all get a chance to vote on it.

Absolutely, we were in favour of the bill, but at the time, I was in the middle of starting to talk about the amendments that happened at committee.

One of the amendments that I felt was very important was the time originally put in this bill: Workers or employees whose family members were ill had to take time in weeks at a time, in blocks. I remember talking about this before. My concern was that not every circumstance would require a staff person or an employee to take that week at a time or two weeks at a time. They may just need a day for their family member to go to a doctor's appointment or if they need some help for that day; it's not a long-term situation that needed a week taking time off work.

The other flipside of that: Number one, the person who you may be looking after wouldn't need that whole time of a week, but the staff member maybe couldn't afford to take that week off, because we know that that time that you're allotted to use now under this bill is unpaid. That was one of the concerns, because if you are required to do that, you're going to end up in a situation where you can be economically disadvantaged. You've got your mortgage to pay. You still have to put food on the table. You have to pay your hydro bill. We know that hydro bills are skyrocketing and that people can't even afford to pay those bills today, let alone when they apply for increases. I was glad to see, when the committee met, that that was one of the amendments that they passed.

I know that the Liberal government, during that committee process, didn't want to agree to that. That's one of the things that I felt was extremely important during third reading: how to describe those turns of events to the people who are here and how those things came to be, because we always profess how important it is, during second reading, that we talk about ways to improve the bill and the important work that the committee does. Once that work came back here, we were being asked to push that bill through really quickly because everybody was in support of it, and I think this is an opportunity that we can take now to talk about what happened in committee and what benefits came out of that hard work that we're always professing is done in committee. That was my point, and I'm glad I'm able to talk about this now for the next five and a half minutes.

That was a tremendous amendment, and I think that the organizations would probably agree. They nodded in agreement. Excellent. I don't know if they were aware of that amendment.

That was the other part of my justification as to why we need a full debate on this whole bill: People out in the

audience, sitting in their living rooms, may not understand that this is an option that was changed. They may have listened to the second reading debate and thought that was the way the bill was going to read. Then that knowledge doesn't transfer into their workplace, where they may have used this bill and said, "Gee, I heard that we had to take it in blocks of a week at a time, but now I've heard the amendment, where Teresa Armstrong from London-Fanshawe was speaking to her constituents out on the couch." I know some of my constituents are listening, like Mrs. Jones out there. I know she's listening to me. And Joyce, I know, is listening as well. They tune in every day. Now they can say, "Hey, I can actually use this amendment. Now I know it's not a week; I can take a day or an afternoon to help my family member, my mother or sister, whoever needs that help." That was great.

The other amendment that they talked about—and it was very important, I think, to the rural community—was the definition of who can actually write that note and describe that serious medical condition. Originally, it was really restricted to a doctor, and that definition was expanded to include a registered nurse because oftentimes, especially in the rural areas and even in my riding, people have a very difficult time finding a doctor. We get a lot of calls where people are trying to get a doctor. They've gone to a few places. They're not accepting them. If you didn't have a doctor but you did see a nurse, they're in a position now where they can write that note for that serious medical condition—where it can give you that opportunity to look after your family member. So that was an important feature, I think, that was discussed in committee, has come to the House and is going to help the people who perhaps need to use this bill.

The last thing I want to talk about, though, in the last few minutes that I have is the fact that this bill is a feel-good bill. The population is getting older, and a lot of us are that sandwich generation, where we're going to have to look after our parents or grandparents. The thing is, people who are maybe put in that situation, who have to look after loved ones, cannot—the precarious employment that we have today: I think that's what I want to touch on. Not everybody has a full-time job. There are a lot of people in my riding who are working two and three part-time jobs and really struggling to make ends meet. Even though this bill has good intentions and I agree with the bill and I think it is going to help people, I really feel for those who have to choose between taking that time off work without pay and having to look after the family member who really needs that medical attention. That's one thing that was something I felt kind of lacked in the bill. Even though it's there for the benefit of people to use, economically, financially, it doesn't help them.

The other piece was the enforcement piece. We felt that it needed to be tightened. Unfortunately, that was overlooked. It's overlooked, and there's not going to be that enforcement piece. I know most people are reasonable employers and staffers who can work things out, but we wanted to protect those workers who maybe

required that enforcement if they got a "no" from their employer and felt that if they took that leave, perhaps their position might be compromised because they exercised this bill and they had no choice because their parent or their child was having a serious operation and they needed to be home with them for that short time.

Those were the few things that, yes, we think—I mean, we're going to vote for this bill and we're going to pass this bill. But it was extremely important and it's also very important for anyone here today who wants to get up—members from their riding—and speak on behalf of this bill on third reading and express their concerns to this government that some of the amendments were certainly made, but we could have gone a little further here and actually made it a much stronger bill in this House.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to rise today and to follow up on the comments from the member from London-Fanshawe.

I just wanted to take the chance to introduce some of the people who have joined us here today in support of this bill. They've been here throughout third reading debate. Many of the people who are here are actually caregivers themselves. In the east and the west members' gallery, we have, from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Sumi Shanmuganathan, Cristin Napier, Nadia Formigoni; from the Canadian Cancer Society, Joanne Di Nardo, Florentina Stancu-Soare; and with the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, Kathryn Fudurich, Helena Adler, Delia Sinclair Frigault, Gene Long, Sue Vanderbent and Catherine Suridjan.

These people have come forward to today to say that they would like this bill to go forward. I believe we're starting to reach that opinion. I hope that in the House this afternoon, we'll allow this excellent bill to go forward.

Simply put, it's about compassion. This bill, if passed, is going to recognize the importance of family and job security. It creates unpaid, job-protected leave for hard-working Ontarians in this province. It's going to help all of us. It's going to help every Ontarian in this province provide care and support to their loved ones in times of greatest need.

1500

It's a bill that I think is clearly supportable by all members of the House. I understand that some conversations have been taking place that would allow us to allow this bill to move forward through the House today. I think it's excellent that the people who have supported this bill have come forward today in order to witness this because I think they understand more than anybody the impact that this bill will have on the everyday lives of ordinary Ontarians at the time they need it most.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to my colleague from London-Fanshawe. She ran in here and gave a wonderful speech.

Mr. Steve Clark: She sprinted.

Mr. Bill Walker: She sprinted in here, yes.

Similar to her and some folks who have spoken to me in my riding—Lera Ryan, a volunteer at the Canadian Cancer Society; members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation have spoken to me; and a number of other volunteer agencies that, again, are in the business of providing care to those most in need—I think this is a good bill. We spoke about it a year ago.

My sadness is, particularly for our guests in the audience—and I won't rename them all; the Minister of Labour did that, so we'll just say "ditto" to what's in Hansard, for all of our friends. It's great to see them continuing to come and put a face—to keep the pressure on this House to do the right thing. Sadly, it could have been done, I think, quicker than it has been. It's a year since the last time I've spoken about it. Think of all the people who could have actually been benefiting from this, had we been able to get the legislation through. That seems to be indicative, unfortunately, of the Liberal government. They bring through what they want, when they want. Unfortunately, as we've seen recently, it's a lot about political gain. It's typically about them either saving seats or trying to win seats. This one doesn't need to be that. All-party support has been here. We need to move it forward.

I'm glad to see some amendments made that we pushed for in our PC caucus. One of the biggest concerns I had was that you had to use a week at a time. An injury, an illness, just doesn't work that way. Many times, it might be just a half a day you need to take care of a loved one, to get them to an appointment, to do something. I'm glad to see that those amendments were made and they're going to be here.

Very similar to some of the other speakers—we need to show that compassion; we need to show that care. We have an aging demographic. The baby boomers are moving through. There's going to be the sandwich generation—I'm kind of in that middle sandwich. We need to be there for our aging parents, and we need to be there for the younger members of our society. I think this type of bill is a good thing, to be able to give that opportunity.

We need to ensure that it's also fair to the employers. When someone leaves who is a valuable employee, we also need them to not lose their job. There's enough people—a million, I believe—unemployed today as a result of this Liberal government.

It's a good piece of legislation. I look forward to speaking about it more when it's my turn.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the comments of my colleague the member from London—Fanshawe, who I think expressed her support for the final product that we see in this bill, the caregiver leave act.

We're certainly happy to hear that the government has realized that family members require a bit more flexibility in the support that they're able to deliver to loved

ones, should that need arise. That was expressed through our caucus, through the committee work and all throughout the debate that we did have the ability to have on this bill—of course, recognizing that it is a little bit prohibitive to have to seek validation from a doctor to be able to receive that clearance to take a leave from your employment. It makes it more flexible to have it through an RN, to be able to validate the need for that leave.

Of course, Speaker, we had hoped that the government would understand that this could be even more of an enhanced type of support mechanism, with supportive dollars attached to family members who had to leave work to supplement their income. Right now, things are tight. People are living day to day, paycheque to paycheque, and to take eight weeks off, whether it be in days or in a block, certainly would create a lot of financial stress on people, all things considered. We hope that the government follows through with what they had intended on, in talking to the federal government to see if they could dovetail into the employment insurance provisions, to seek some sort of support through that mechanism. I don't know if that is happening. I hope those discussions are happening. It's certainly something that we could see as an added component to make this bill as effective as it possibly can, to deliver that care that we know families desperately need when they're ill.

Speaker, I'm certainly supportive of the bill, and I'll look forward to more debate on it.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 21, Leaves to Help Families.

I listened attentively, Mr. Speaker, to the comments from the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and the lead speaker, the member from London—Fanshawe, and earlier the member from Essex, all supporting Bill 21.

Let me just remind the members opposite, we have now debated Bill 21 for 13 hours during second reading and more than six hours in third reading—over 19 hours in total. Over 67 members of this House have spoken about this bill, yet I just heard that the member from Essex wants more amendments to the bill to improve it in terms of finance. That kind of amendment needs to be done through committee.

My question here is, Mr. Speaker, as we do the third reading debate: Is it the intention of both opposition parties to have this bill passed?

Interjection.

Ms. Soo Wong: Then let's cut to the chase, because at the end of the day Ontarians are looking to this House for leadership. Let's call the question, but more importantly, folks—because we need to remember that our duty is to Ontarians and every family member who is seeking this bill, to support their care. More importantly, when I hear opposition members like the member from Bruce—Grey say they support the bill, why don't you encourage your members to do the same? At the end of the day, Ontarians are looking to this House for leadership, and I believe strongly that stalling this bill's passage through

debate will not help this bill through. I am encouraging everyone to get this legislation through, because Ontarians are looking to us to provide this passage.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): A point of order, the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: A point of order, through you: I just listened to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt, and she talked about how much debate we've had. I checked with the table prior to Bill 21 being called, and I understand for third reading we've only had five hours and 45 minutes of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's fine. I don't find a point of order, but it's interesting information.

We now go back to the member for London–Fanshawe, who has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm going to go over something I went over before, which is that I hear what the Liberal members are saying; I hear that. But rushing through things is not a way to make decisions.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Rushing?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Rushing. Third reading is a democratic process we have in this House. If a member wants to speak to the bill, they have every right to get up and speak to the bill. You know what? Honestly, I remember when I was talking to the bill earlier. I forget who the member was. He acted—I don't know if he was actually angry, but he acted very much like he was upset with the opposition for not pushing this bill through and getting it on the House paper to vote on it and calling the vote.

With all due respect, we are here to speak to bills that are presented in this House, to give feedback, and I believe that wholeheartedly. Yes, there are bills I would like to see rushed through too, that the New Democrats have put forward, but I'm not going to stand here and say, "We don't need debate on this. We don't want to hear your views, over on this side." It has to be discussed fully—that's my personality—and it has to be dissected. You want to get things right. When you have legislation, it can't be half-baked. I've heard that a lot. This actually applies in any kind of legislation: It can't be half-baked. A full debate; it goes to committee; all the work is done. When it comes back here, you can be proud of the bill that we're going to pass when it comes to a vote.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 21, the leaves to families act. I know we're in third reading and I heard there are concerns from people that it's not going through fast enough. However, this is an important bill. I think it's fair to say that all members of this House support this bill. It's not that often we have a bill where we can support it even as amended.

I wanted to put a few things on the record today and bring in a couple of other things that tie into it somewhat,

because a lot of the things we do with legislation may have a direct impact on other pieces of legislation. I want to tie a little bit into community care access centres and some of the great work that our hospice organizations do as well.

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Under the explanatory note: "The bill amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000.

"Section 49.3, which creates family caregiver leave, is added to the act. Under section 49.3, an employee is entitled to a leave of absence without pay to provide care or support to a family member who has a serious medical condition. An employee may take up to eight weeks per calendar year with respect to each family member described in the section or prescribed by regulation. Entitlement to family caregiver leave is in addition to any entitlement to family medical leave under section 49.1, critically ill child care leave under section 49.4, crime-related child death or disappearance leave under section 49.5 and personal emergency leave under section 50.

"Section 49.4, which creates critically ill child care leave, is added to the act. Under section 49.4, an employee who has been employed by his or her employer for at least six consecutive months is entitled to a leave of absence without pay of up to 37 weeks to provide care or support to a critically ill child. Entitlement to critically ill child care leave is in addition to any entitlement to family medical leave under section 49.1, family caregiver leave under section 49.3, crime-related child death or disappearance leave under section 49.5 and personal emergency leave under section 50.

"Section 49.5, which creates crime-related child death or disappearance leave, is added to the act. Under section 49.5, an employee who has been employed by his or her employer for at least six consecutive months is entitled to a leave of absence without pay if a child of the employee dies or disappears and it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child died or disappeared as a result of a crime. An employee is not entitled to a leave of absence under section 49.5 if the employee is charged with the crime or if it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child was a party to the crime. An employee may take a leave of up to 104 weeks with respect to the death of a child and up to 52 weeks with respect to the disappearance of a child. Entitlement to crime-related child death or disappearance leave is in addition to any entitlement to family medical leave under section 49.1, family caregiver leave under section 49.3, critically ill child care leave under section 49.4 and personal emergency leave under section 50.

"Section 52.1, which sets out rules relating to leaves required to be taken in periods of entire weeks, is added to the act."

Of course it comes into effect when it receives royal assent.

I've had a few people in my riding come forward, and they have asked us to support this bill mainly because of some sad situations. You think of the disappearance of a child. I can think of a friend of mine up in Midland,

Debbie Just, who lost her son, Jake Just. It's now years ago that he disappeared from a Halloween party. Every day, Debbie lives this story over and over again. I've known her for a number of years—I actually can't recall the exact day. But he just disappeared, and no one has been able to trace him to this day. He was, I think, 18 years of age at the time. I think he'd be somewhere in his early 30s today.

Knowing families like that, and knowing that she was going through employment at the time, the pain she suffered had to be absolutely incredible. That's the one person I want to put on the record. I didn't ask her permission to put it on the record, but I wanted to say that because I've known Debbie a few years, and I can tell you that it's a pain that doesn't go away. I believe it's up for two years—that pain is still there even many, many years later, and you think of these kinds of examples.

We hear, each and every day, stories from people. Some people come into this Legislature and give examples: A certain medication may be required to prolong their life, whether it's cancer or I think it was for cystic fibrosis that the young lady was here just the other day. Those are sad, sad stories of those families. The trauma they go through is so intense that it's hard to believe that some families go through that. It just makes you appreciate what we have when our children are healthy, and they're looking at things in a positive way, and we don't have to worry about something as serious as a medical death or some kind of an accident, whatever it may be. From that perspective alone, there have been a few examples that have come forward to my office where they asked us to support this bill. I think our caucus is. I'm not sure the amendments are exactly right—I wasn't part of the committee that did the work on the amendments. However, usually we get the amendments fairly accurate, so I think it's safe to say that we would be pretty supportive of the amendments as well.

My problem with the bill is—and it would be interesting to hear, and it may well already be in Hansard and they may have been discussed already. When I look at all the things that I read in the explanatory note, I'm wondering how many of those things that are regulated are difficult to actually implement. I'm thinking of a child's death or a disappearance, or the child of a loved one. Is there going to be any kind of a problem—I guess the problem is, so many of these regulations we develop here seem so easy when we say it in a bill, but when you try to implement it after, quite often, we're into some very, very difficult decisions. That is a problem. Then you hear these stories where someone never did get their right to leave work because of some tiny part of the regulation that didn't really meet—

Mr. Michael Harris: A technicality.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yes, a technicality—maybe a bureaucratic decision that has caused somebody some grief over this. If we're creating a bill that's supposed to be so sentimental and emotional as this legislation is required to be, I'm hoping that no matter what happens, this is something that can actually be implemented

without any kinds of barriers whatsoever. I think it's really difficult for these families when they have already had the loss, then they come back later and have a more difficult decision.

I know we've got some support for the bill. I've got a letter here that I wanted to put on the record from Spinal Cord Injury Ontario. It says:

“I am writing on behalf of Spinal Cord Injury Ontario (formerly the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario). We are a lead organization with the Ontario Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Alliance, a network of key SCI stakeholders from 70+ organizations including people with SCI, researchers, service providers, physicians, and funders from across Ontario that spans the continuum of care from injury onset through to community reintegration. We ask that the Progressive Conservative caucus work with the governing party and the third party to pass Bill 21, the Employment Standards Act (Leaves to Help Families). We support its implementation into law at the earliest possible opportunity. Along with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, we do not believe it is beneficial to prolong the process with further debate as amendments put forward by your party that we made in committee.

“As you are aware, major illnesses place pressures on families, both emotional and financial. People who are ill should be able to rely on family caregivers without fear that their caregiver will lose his or her job. Bill 21 permits eligible persons to take unpaid leave to address catastrophic life episodes and to re-enter the workforce with ease once the leave has ended.

“This is legislation that all parties can—and should—support.”

One of the things, as I read letters like that, is that on the one hand, I feel this is really something for the employees, but if you're a small business employer and you have that type of a situation happen to yourself, that's also traumatic. I understand that there's no way that there's any kind of compensation or anything; it's their business. They have to live with whatever the problems may be. That worries me a little bit. I worry that the employer is under these rules, under the Employment Standards Act, to give someone the right to take time off work—it should be that way—but when they have the same situation happen to them, there's no one who comes to help them in any way. In fact, that's probably the time when you'd find the bureaucracy move in more than ever, through the College of Trades or workmen's compensation or something like that. They come in and they hassle these people out of existence. That's the type of thing that I worry about as well. We've got a number of people in small business who have the same kinds of situations happen to them as well. I think we all know some of those families. I know of cases in my riding, people with car dealerships and that sort of thing, and they've lost a child to cancer or whatever it may be, and in the end they come forward as community leaders in fundraising for that child's disease, whether it's some form of cancer or cystic fibrosis or whatever those may be. I can tell you that there's no one there to help them

except the whole community that tries to support that business because they are true leaders in that business.

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The other thing that I wanted to put on the record and talk a little bit about today is the work done in these situations where people pass on, where they know they are going to die and they have to go to something like a hospice. I can tell you that I am so pleased to work with the two organizations in my riding, Hospice Huronia and Hospice Simcoe. Hospice Simcoe has a new facility just on the outskirts of my riding and Rod Jackson's riding, right in Barrie, and it serves Muskoka and Simcoe county right now. I have to tell you that at that particular facility, when it was first built, people thought, "Jeez, it seems like a big building"—a lot of money, a lot of expense and that sort of thing. However, it has been a godsend to many, many families. A few people have come up to me after they lost a husband or a father or, in one case, a mother. They came and said, "You know what? We have to keep funding these. We have to keep supporting these." They really were such a wonderful way for that person to end their life, with their family surrounding them and in good care. As they passed on, it was interesting to hear the comments come back after. This is a very, very emotional time of people's lives, when they see someone pass on like that. So I should say a special thank you to Hospice Simcoe and Hospice Huronia, but to all the people who operate hospice organizations in our province and our country, a very special thank you, because it is so nice that people can leave this world in dignity and respect, with their families surrounding them. It means an awful lot to those families and I just wanted to pass that on, because it's very, very important.

The other thing, on more of a negative side, that I'd like to speak on for a couple of minutes is the problems that we have with people as they are—we talked about the sandwich generation. There are a number of people where we're trying to get seniors to live in their homes. It's been a mandate or sort of a goal, aging at home and all these types of things, but one of the things that is really failing us right now, and I've mentioned this on a number of occasions, is the fact that the community care access centres really are not budgeted or funded to where they should be. I can tell you that right now they're starting a new year, as of April 1, but boy, we've had some real problems in my riding, in my constituency offices, trying to work with the families and trying to find any help whatsoever. In one case, you're saying that we've got community care access to come in and help someone after they have recovered from the hospital. Many of those people who are recovering from the hospital are terminal. The fact of the matter is that we're going to give people time off on one hand, but when we do need the health care and home care, quite often it's not there. It's certainly not there in enough hours.

I think it's interesting that we work with that as well, because health care, I think, is on the tip of what could be almost disastrous if we don't handle this thing carefully. We've got this baby boomer generation who are retiring

quickly now, and what could happen with long-term-care beds and community care access funding could be considered to be almost disastrous if it's not handled properly in the next decade—not just the next decade, but the next 20 years. We just can't turn our back on that and say that the funding programs that are in place now are sufficient, because as people age and get sicker, we are going to have to have that help for them.

I know that every government faces it. I think that probably every government across our nation faces it, and I think the federal government acknowledges that. But at the same time, this grey tsunami, as we call it, is heading towards those years when they're 75 to 85 to 95. We all know as MPPs that we get invited all the time to milestone birthdays like 90, and you probably know yourself how many people now reach 100 years of age. It's amazing. You can hardly believe it at times. Mr. Speaker, even in my 15 years as an MPP, I attend far more people turning 100 years of age today than I did 15 years ago.

We're seeing people living longer. They're living healthier, but as they get to the last years of their life, and sometimes it's the last months of their lives, that's when they need the most health care of any time in their life, and they are at their very sickest. It sort of ties into people having time off to work with their families, but it also ties into the fact that that's why we have these programs like home care and our community care access centres: so we can actually make sure that people have nursing assistance as well.

It's nice that the caregiver assistance is there, and thank God for any family that does have a son or a daughter or a grandson or a granddaughter who can help the family through that difficult time. But at the same time, we still have to worry about whether the funding will be there. It's a Ministry of Labour bill, but the bill actually has Ministry of Health repercussions because, you know what? We're looking down the road at other things as well.

I think all governments have done it in the past. I think too many of us are working in silos. This is a Ministry of Labour bill, and I'm not sure what the regulations will be with that, but we also have Ministry of Health repercussions over here, with home care, aging at home, hospices etc.; it blends in very nicely. These all tie together into what makes our province.

As we said earlier, our party will be supporting the bill. We know there has been a lot of debate on it, but it's good debate. Anything I've heard seem to be positive steps, like the member for London-Fanshawe and her speech. I thought there were some good comments she made. We'll hear others this afternoon as we move forward as well.

However, at the same time, I know the government is wanting to get this bill passed like that because they want to get on to some bill that they probably want to rush through. That's why I think we have to be careful with it. I thank everyone for the opportunity to say a few words today.

I just want to close by saying that, through our health care white papers and the work we've done on behalf of the PC caucus, I know we have put a lot of thought into seniors' health. It has been a major part of our white paper commitments, and it's something that we want to go to the people with with really strong support to make sure that we can provide the services, that they are going to be there.

That's why we continue to talk about job creation and more jobs. We have to have people working so that we can create that wealth so that people will pay taxes to pay for these things like home care, hospices and giving businesses the opportunity to give people time off so they can have their leave when a loved one is sick, like under Bill 21.

These are sad stories, and I applaud the government for bringing the bill forward. But first of all, we have to say that we can't over-regulate it, making sure that it is streamlined so that it will work for everyone; and second of all so that when we get down to the fine details of it, it does blend in nicely with community care access centres, hospices and our health care system, because I think it's all one-on-one.

There's a little more on disappearing children, which would be a crime ministry, of course. But overall, this is very important for families in Ontario, and I thank you today, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to say a few words. I look forward to any comments on my debate this afternoon.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I wasn't going to rise and speak to this; I'm interested in moving it along as fast as I can. But in response to the member from Scarborough—Agin-court's suggestion that we shouldn't be talking about it anymore, some of us on this side of the house see that as an attack on democracy. As you know, Speaker, we're all here to make democracy work. So I thought I would say to the member: There's a great quotation out there from one of the greatest Canadians, Tommy Douglas, who, as you know, was a great champion of democracy at the provincial level and at the federal level. Tommy Douglas said, "The greatest way to defend" democracy "is to make it work."

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"Unless democracy can give people full stomachs, clothing to wear, decent houses to live in, educational opportunities, security in their old age, health services for themselves and their families when they need it—unless democracy can do that, democracy will have failed."

"It's your job and mine to make democracy work."

So I say to the member: We're here to make democracy work. Part of making democracy work is to stand and speak on behalf of your constituents, to speak on behalf of the people of Ontario to make a bill even better than what is proposed; and there should not be a time limit on that.

Speaker, in the interest of moving it along, I'll give up the rest of my time. But I wanted to make the point that

democracy works when we all stand in our place and have an opportunity to speak to whatever is on the floor.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: As a physician, parliamentarian and member of the government, of course, I wholly support and recommend to this House that we all support Bill 21, the family leave act.

I will certainly take my honourable colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh at his word when he itemizes and reminisces about the value of democracy. I would just simply say that we have now had 68 members of this Legislature exercise their democratic right on what I think is a relatively benign bill that we might want to get out to the people of Ontario.

With due respect, of course, to the honoured memory of Tommy Douglas, at some point, members on this side of the House would welcome a hero from this century as opposed to the previous century. But, be that as it may, I'll let that sit with you.

Speaker, we are looking at a bill that empowers family members to essentially express their love, compassion and caregiving to members of their family who are undergoing catastrophic illness. As was rightly cited by some of my colleagues opposite, with the demographic shift, the greying of the country as we age and experience more and more illnesses—whether it's cancer or post-surgical, post hip or knee replacement and so on—those are the times when we need these types of leave, and this act should be passed right away.

As I say, with respect, certainly, to the democratic process, I think those of us on this side of the House at some point would like to see the light at the end of the tunnel, the end point and the exercise and the diffuse broadcast of our democratic right by getting this bill passed. Let's move it out to the people of Ontario: Bill 21, the family leave act.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a privilege to follow my colleague from Simcoe North. I commend him. He speaks from the heart. He has passion. He cares about his constituents. Every time he comes to this Legislature, he talks about the things that are truly about people and what's going to impact their lives.

He has done a whale of a job—an exemplary job—against the College of Trades. He's out there working on behalf of the everyday working man and woman who just wants to make a life in this great province, and he's done a great job.

He has spoken a lot in his comments about the groups that are here—Spinal Cord Injury Ontario and Canadian Paraplegic Association—who have supported this and wanted it to happen. We have talked about the cancer society and the heart and stroke folks, who, again, are keeping our feet to the fire. I applaud them yet again for doing that.

He talked about a residential hospice, and I, too, have one in my riding, the Residential Hospice of Grey Bruce,

that provides great care to that section of our society who need our help at the very end of their lives and who have paved the way for us, Mr. Speaker. So this bill will be very helpful.

He talked about health care and how critical a stage we are at in our evolution as a province of what is needed for this demographic, the baby boomers and all people, of health care.

I would just like to say that I'm not certain that this government, in most people's eyes, is deemed to be doing a very good job. They've dropped the ball on a lot of files in health care. I'm not certain if you talked to the general populace that they feel they have a better health care system. I hope this bill will move us towards that.

He talked about the disappearance of a child in his riding. I send out my heartfelt sympathy to Debbie, the mom, and the whole extended family for that. I can't even fathom what they would go through during this type of thing. A bill like this could give them just that little bit of relief, respite, to be able to step back from their lives and deal with that grief and stress at their time of most need.

I will be speaking to that, Speaker—I am the next speaker up, and I will be giving a little bit of my thoughts on this topic. But I'm really hopeful that the three parties have worked on this to make some amendments, and I look forward to supporting it when it actually comes to the vote.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again—and it truly is—it's always an honour to be able to speak in this House and to follow the member from Simcoe North. I would like to say something about the remarks from the member from Simcoe North. They were thoughtful. He talked about people in his own riding, people who have suffered a great deal and people who a bill like this could help. He had some reservations about the bill. There have been some changes. This is third reading of the bill, so the bill is much better than the last time it was debated here.

But there have also been comments from other members—one is the member from Etobicoke North—that this is a relatively benign bill, and we should rush it through and it's going to help a lot of people. I would like to remind the member from Etobicoke North that the government had a majority for eight years and had the opportunity to rush a lot of bills through the House. A lot of those bills turned out rather badly, and maybe that's why: because they didn't take the time to actually listen.

The member from Etobicoke North also mentioned that only 68 members—or he meant it differently—well, perhaps, on many issues, all 107 should speak, because all of us have different life experiences; all of us have something to add. It has taken many, many years to develop a parliamentary process that actually—and I do believe that all of us believe that the parliamentary process—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Should be respected.

Mr. John Vanthof: —should be respected, thank you, and that works. It bothers me to my core when I hear,

“Well, we no longer have time to talk.” This is the only time we have to actually make sure things are done right. We've all seen bills when they have been rushed through, especially in majority Parliaments, and they haven't been done right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Simcoe North for his reply.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I want to thank the members from Etobicoke North, Windsor–Tecumseh, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Timiskaming–Cochrane for their comments.

Just in summary, I didn't try to put a spin on the fact that there was anything negative about the bill. I'm just concerned with it. I've seen so many times in regulation where there are delay tactics or there are technicalities that stop people from getting the service or the intent of the bill. We have watched it over and over again, and I'll tell you, we—and, of course, most of the government members—are completely hidden from that. We don't get a chance to see it. We don't have a chance to have committee hearings on regulation. That's done by the people who run the bureaucracy here, and in most cases it's done well.

But at the same time, you have got to keep in mind that this bill is meant to help people during a very emotional time in their lives. It's a very traumatic time when they lose a child through a disappearance or a severe sickness. I can tell you, as a caregiver, I think that we really do need to make sure that whatever happens, we have an expediency in the regulations that allows them not to have any more heartache. That's really what I'm getting at here more than anything else—not to run into some wall where there's a bureaucracy of people out there, saying, “You can't have service” or “You can't have the time off” because of this, this and this, because we didn't clearly understand it. That's what I was getting at more than anything here.

The intent of the bill is great. I hope it works well, and the fewer cases we have to use it in, the better, because we'll have less people with that kind of sickness etc.

Thank you for the comments from the other members. I appreciated the opportunity this afternoon.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. This bill hits pretty close to home. My best friends lost their daughter Robin, my godchild, a number of years ago. I still cannot even try to comprehend what they went through at that time and still, every day of their lives, continue to go through, to try to somehow move forward. This bill, Speaker, had it been enacted back in that time, would have allowed them some time to step back, some time to even know what was happening in their lives. Unfortunately, at the age we are raising young children—the realities of a mortgage, the realities of bills to pay—most of us feel very challenged to take any time off, because you have to have that to be able to continue your life the best that you know how. This would have

allowed them to be able to step back, to be able to grieve properly, to take some time and collect their thoughts, without the fear of whether they could afford it or worrying about whether their job would be there. They could have spent time with family and friends doing what they needed to do, and that was truly just recouping the loss that they had just suffered.

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Sadly, my wife's best friends from the UK had recently immigrated to this country and lost their son at 18 years old—very similar. They were in an even more stressful situation because they were trying to establish their lives here in our great country of Canada, our great province of Ontario, and in this case, Huron–Bruce is where they had moved to. Mr. Speaker, I can't even imagine what they did and continue to go through. They were looking for jobs. Fortunately, they had found some part-time work, but they really couldn't afford to step back. They had to just trudge through and do the best they could. They were trying to adjust from their life in England and moving here and the transition and the lack of family that they didn't have as a support circle.

Mr. Speaker, this bill—certainly, its time is due. A year ago, I spoke to this bill and I had concerns at that time that, again, there were some things that we wanted to be amended. I think it's shown that the committee structure that we have under our government structure can actually work. We can put amendments through. The committee debated—I wasn't fortunate enough to sit on that committee, so I don't know all of the exact detail that they went through and what they needed to detail through there, but I think the bill has come out with a good structure now. My biggest worry was that they were actually going to make you take weeks off at a time. That just, to me, doesn't work. It's not reality. It's not practical. People don't always have a seven-day schedule of appointments or the need that they may have to address. They need it when they need it. It can be a cumulative eight weeks. I believe that's the best way to serve—our health care system is moving to care at home, and that is something that I certainly support. We're going to have to do that with our aging demographic. However, we need to do things with practicality, we need to do them with strategy, and we need, when we're designing legislation, to do it with the reality of how the family is going to actually deal with it, how it actually will—I think my colleague from Simcoe North asked about the execution. He asked about how it'll actually be implemented out there.

I'm hopeful that Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, will actually parallel—which I'm glad to see—recent changes by the federal government to the Canadian labour code.

My caucus colleagues here on the PC side, the official opposition to the government, have listened.

I applaud the Liberal government, in this case, for actually listening to those amendments and making some changes—as opposed to how it was first introduced. It doesn't let them off the hook for trying to rush a bill

through with a lot of glaring errors in it. That is our job, and with the third party—some of their members spoke up and offered similar amendments. I think it does show that this government can work when we truly come to the table and actually put our hearts first and our constituents first. That's not always the case in here, but I'm not going to go down that path today.

The other thing that's important is this, is a bill that actually is not going to cost the government any money, because it isn't going to be related—people are going to have that ability. It may have an impact to the employer, and that's a challenge that I think—again, everything we do has to balance. As my colleague from Durham says, that is a cost to business, and we have to do everything in this House to ensure that we're not putting business at a disadvantage. Recently, this government, with their energy costs skyrocketing and going through the roof, has put business at a disadvantage. The red tape bureaucracy that they've created has put our businesses at a disadvantage. This piece of legislation, fortunately, has sidestepped some of those and not created more issues.

Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound called me and wrote to me about Bill 21 and said it was about time. Again, I just wish we could rewind the clock for those family members and friends of mine who have suffered through this without any type of legislation in place that could have helped them. But the reality is, like me coming into this House, I can't change the past. What I can do is work my hardest to change things going forward and ensure that we have that. They're the same people who called me when the government began cutting front-line health services, which bore an immediate impact on them and their loved ones.

Just for the record, this government, the Liberal government, started cutting back health in 2004, starting with physiotherapy and eye care, and gradually moved, more recently, to physiotherapy services for seniors. I do have some concerns still with the government, and my colleague from Simcoe North talked at length about health care and the crucial point where we are in our evolution as a province, the precipice that we're on. We can either do health care very well and ensure that we have the services and programs that we need, or we can play games with health care and try to make the headlines, but really not be concerned about the true impact to those people we're serving.

My constituents think it's a shame that front-line services are cut and replaced with more government bureaucracy like the LHINs and the CCACs. Again, my colleague from Simcoe North alluded to this. A lot of effort, a lot of energy and, unfortunately, a lot of financial resources are going to bureaucracy, administration and shuffling paper around, rather than where the focus should be, as it is in our white papers on health care. Everything should focus on the actual patient and the care they are going to need to receive.

We have LHINs and CCACs that are building huge fiefdoms out there. I know some of the people who work there. I meet with them fairly regularly. They're all very

good people, and they have, I'm sure, the right intent at heart. But at the end of the day, I think, as a government we need to show leadership on the health care file. We need to not be allowing things that are getting in the way of patient care or, in fact, taking away from patient care to be allowed to continue. We'll look at that with a very strategic thought process to ensure that everything we do and every penny we spend as a government, as leaders who are representing the great people of this great province who give us the privilege of serving them, should be about health care and the services and programs across the spectrum of our portfolios that we're going to provide.

I may be getting off topic a little bit, but it's one of those things, again, where, every time I'm in this House, I just have to implore the government of the day, particularly the health minister and the finance minister: The Markdale hospital was committed to over 10 years ago to build a new hospital in Markdale. They challenged the community to go out and raise money. They did. There has been \$12 million sitting in the bank, which is fairly significant money for a small, rural area like Markdale. The people there rose to the challenge in record time. The money has been there. Now all they're asking for is a government to actually honour its commitment, to do the thing that they should do and, as my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West often refers to in this House, do the honourable thing, to step up and actually commit to what they said they would.

I'm going to put another plug in. I truly hope, as this budget is being worked on, I'm told—although I think that they've leaked it a little ahead. There's lots of funding in there, I think \$5.7 billion more than they are actually bringing in, despite record revenues. I just hope that one small little sliver of that can be moved over to the Markdale hospital to make that a priority.

But Mr. Speaker, I don't want to get you in trouble or have someone stand on a point of order, so I'll get back to Bill 21 more specifically.

One Markdale resident said: "I am asking that you continue to support people dealing with cancer and their families, and others with serious illnesses. I understand that Bill 21 ... would provide job security for family caregivers who take time to care for loved ones with a serious medical condition. Please help ensure that Bill 21 comes to a vote. All parties support it. It's time to vote and get it passed"—Lera Ryan, Markdale. Lera is one of our volunteers with our local Canadian Cancer Society, and to her credit, she yet again emailed me this morning. I'm sure she phoned the office, even though I've been in the House all day. She has probably been sending out tweets and everything else that she can do. She's just like our folks in the gallery, who really put their heart and soul into their efforts. You know what? We wouldn't have as great a province as we do without the volunteers like those in the audience and Lera Ryan.

Lera, hats off to you. Keep doing what you're doing, because I am listening. I am bringing your thoughts to the House, and I will do that every day that I have the privilege of standing here.

I also had a meeting with the Victorian Order of Nurses to review a report on the impact of those unpaid family and friend caregivers. As they say, with the way our aging demographic, the baby boomers, is moving, that's going to become more and more the trend. That's going to become more and more the way of life, and we need to be thinking about legislation that is going to enable those people to do that, to actually support and encourage, rather than finding—again, I think I recall my colleague from Simcoe North saying that he was concerned about some of the actual implementation and bureaucracy and regulation getting in the way of the spirit and intent of this type of legislation. I want to make sure, when this legislation is signed, that it does honour that spirit of intent, and that, at the end of the day, it's actually supportive and encouraging and finds ways to make it happen, as opposed to putting blockades in the way. Much of the legislation I've seen introduced, unfortunately, by the Liberal government, in my short tenure of two and a half years, is actually much more bureaucratic, putting speed bumps, preventing things from moving forward.

Home and Community Care in Canada: An Economic Footprint found that the estimated total spending for home and community care in 2010 ranged from \$9 billion to \$10.5 billion, accounting for between 4.6% and 5.5% of total health spending in Canada. That's a significant sum of money. We need to ensure that, again, like everything we do—and when I come to this House every day, my every thought is that every cent should be invested strategically, wisely, for the best outcomes, the productivity of getting people the most program and service that we can.

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Another study estimated that the total economic contribution of unpaid caregivers in Canada was in the range of \$25 billion to \$26 billion in 2009 alone. Hats off to our volunteers. We could not have the great province that we have now—although there are a lot of things that we need to be doing better and need to strive to always improve—without those volunteers. That contribution of \$25 billion to \$26 billion in one year alone is just monumental, and we can't say enough. So hats off to all of those people out there in whatever capacity in which you volunteer in our great communities.

Of course, the demand for both unpaid and paid activities required to service the needs of home care recipients is going to continue to grow. It's expected, obviously, as that baby boomer moves through the system. Again, I implore all of us to come to this House with innovative thought processes. We can't continue to think of how it was done in the past and expect that to get us where we are.

A number that I remember was given to me shortly after I got here, when I was deputy critic of health care, was that by 2030, 80 cents of every single dollar in taxation we bring in was going to be allotted to health care if we keep going down the same path that we are today.

Mr. Speaker, we can't be tinkering at the edges. We need to be bold, we need to be innovative, but everything that we do, we have to do with the thought of the patient first. We have to think of this in human terms, not dollars and cents. We need to ensure that, always, the people are the fundamental, the absolute and the only priority that we're thinking of—obviously with some balance of fiscal responsibility, and I believe that's what we as Progressive Conservatives bring to the table. We bring fiscal responsibility with a social conscience. That certainly is how I come to this House. It's how I'll always represent myself in this House, despite what others may try to say at times when they stand and rise towards me. We need to always put the human element in everything we do, and this is a prime example.

In this case, I think we have to, again, think of Bill 21. I think it is a step in the right direction. It's going to allow people to take that time off in their time of need and not be fearful of losing their job, losing their house, losing their car or whatever they may be utilizing their funds to pay for. We all have bills to pay, and I think at a time like this you don't want to have that added stress and grief on top of an already challenging and traumatic situation, which is the case for most.

In recognizing all caregivers, I would like to remind the government of the recent calls they've put in—and our PC caucus colleagues, as well, have raised it in this House numerous times—to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care as it concerns our seniors and access to life-saving drugs. On the issue of access to Esbriet, a drug approved by Health Canada two years ago as the first and only available treatment in Canada to treat IPF, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, I think it's absolutely shameful that the Ministry of Health is refusing to fund it. When we have our federal government that has already approved a drug, it absolutely baffles my mind why we here in Ontario cannot make this thing happen. Not “we,” because I think with different leadership this wouldn't be happening. It drives me crazy when I hear the Minister of Health standing up and finding bureaucratic technicalities or saying, “We're still studying. We're still looking. We're still”—you know what? People's lives are on the line. We can waste a billion dollars on boondoggle gas plants to buy seats, but we can't fund life-saving treatment and medicines. In Canada, it's shameful; in Ontario, it's certainly shameful; and for the people that I represent in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the rest of the province, it's absolutely shameful. Twelve MPPs have raised this issue multiple times in the Legislature, either as a direct question to Minister Matthews, a statement made on behalf of a local constituent, or petitions read into the official record of Hansard. To date, over 3,000 Ontarians have signed their names to the IPF petition, and that support continues to grow every day.

Again, I implore the minister to take a sober second thought when she's really putting her priorities, when this government is looking at priorities. Again, they are going to find a way to spend \$5.7 billion more than they bring

in, despite record revenues, but they can't fund drugs that are actually going to help people and save lives in our province. It baffles me. I don't know how many times I can say it in this House. I think it's shameful. I think there's a better way that we can do some of these things. There are definitely better ways than how the Liberal government over the last 10 years have spent money, and I think we need to be focusing back on things like our medicine.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for York–South Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese:—speaking to the essence of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I will say to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound that, of course, we want our remarks, obviously, to be relevant to the bill, and I would ask him to bring his comments back to the conditions of the bill.

Mr. Bill Walker: My pleasure, Mr. Speaker. I think it's actually a good reminder because I believe that the essence of the intent, the spirit of the intent of Bill 21, is, at the end of the day, to provide people the ability to provide better health care to those they love and to those who need the care. In this case, I do believe very factually that I'm speaking to the spirit and intent of the bill, because I'm talking about health care—perhaps on a bit broader thought process, perhaps on a bit broader stream, but health care is health care. Whether it's someone having time to spend and just hold the hand of a dear loved one in their last dying moments or whether it's actually providing a drug like Esbriet that is going to save the life of someone or extend the quality of life of someone, health care is health care is health care. I think that the day that we start worrying about the technicalities of whether someone is speaking to the bill as opposed to the spirit of health care and standing for those loved ones and those we care for—I'm going to stand and do what I can, Mr. Speaker.

I came here to make a difference. I came here to be able to put legislation in place that will actually improve the lives of Ontarians, improve the lives of those people I have the privilege and pleasure to serve and, most importantly, to all of the people but, most importantly, to the young people who are sitting in front of you and those I have at home, my friends, my loved ones—and those I don't even know.

We need a province that's going to have hope for the next generation, and we need to always put our best foot forward to ensure that any legislation we're putting in place has that in mind. We have to ensure that these great young people are going to have hope, that they want to remain in Ontario and want to be the next level of leaders. I believe that many of our pages that I speak to want to aspire to become politicians and show that leadership.

Hon. John Gerretsen: The pages?

Mr. Bill Walker: Absolutely, and I applaud them for that. They're taking part in democracy. They're actually the next generation that will become—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Get a good job.

Mr. Bill Walker: I can't believe, Mr. Gerretsen, you would say, "Get a good job." What more noble job than serving the people of our great province? This is a fabulous job, and I want to implore every one of those pages to give consideration to standing in this House proudly and stepping up for the people who need it the most: the undertrodden; those most in need; those people who need care and hope and, at the end of the day, as I've said numerous times, whether that be a hand to hold, a listening ear or just the knowledge that someone actually is stopping in their day to care for you.

I've had calls, getting back to specifics—people caring for family members with Alzheimer's are calling my office for help in accessing a long-term-care bed for their parents and loved ones.

So I get back to my colleague across the floor: This is about health care. We need to make decisions that are going to help. We see all kinds of need out there in the health care sector, and we need to do that.

As you should be aware, seniors labelled with behavioural issues or dementia or Alzheimer's have a much more difficult time accessing a bed as they're labelled "difficult clients." Today, people suffering from dementia in Ontario will wait an average of 113 days for a long-term-care bed, and this varies considerably across the province, with some regions waiting for over eight months. Think of that family again—and it comes back to this Bill 21. Those family members can maybe step in and be that helping hand to move them through that transition, a very daunting time in life for those who are suffering from such ailments, to be able to move out of their home into a whole new surroundings. So this bill will allow those people to be part of that process. This will allow those people to step up and, without fear of recrimination from an employer, fear of losing again whatever their valued possessions may be—it gives them the opportunity to be able to do that.

I'm just going to close on one of the colleagues—Etobicoke North stood up here and was a bit sanctimonious, I believe, suggesting that democracy is not being served because there's a lot of time being spent debating this bill. I'd like to bring to the attention of those people listening at home that the government agencies committee—three members from the Liberal Party spent four months from the committee just to get a simple study released to them. So I don't think he should be standing in the House giving us lectures when we're standing up trying to make sure that the needs of our constituents are brought to the House. That's my democratic right. It's the right of the people who actually elected me. In a bill that I believe is absolutely crucial to care provision going forward, I will do what I can every day to stand in this House and bring my story to do whatever I can to influence the passage of this bill.

It's something that's long overdue. As I referenced in my opening remarks, I have a personal connection to families that could have benefited greatly from a bill such as this, Mr. Speaker—the ability to step back and actually

take time to just even understand what's going on in their lives, such as the traumatic loss of a child. I'm pleased, as I said earlier, that the three parties seem to have brought two more thought processes. We have the amendments in place. I think the bill is much better than when it was rushed through the door the first time. I'm hopeful that when we get to the vote process in the very near future, everyone will stand up and commit to it and we'll have this legislation enacted.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I listened intently to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He's a bit of a fast talker. I mean that in the best-case scenario. He's the fastest talker in this place.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's just fast; it's just plain fast.

It's interesting, because I think some of his comments are contradictory, if I could put it so plainly. He has made the case that health care is health care is health care. Yet there is no doubt about it that under the previous government, the privatization of health care slid right into this province like a snake that we are dealing with day in and day out. Unfortunately, it has been supported as well by the current government that is in this House here.

But there is a lot of good in trying to bring legislation to this House which actually would support families, as they go through a very stressful time, around caregiving. There is actually a family in my riding today that is making a very difficult decision with regard to their son, and they need this. They need the relief and the assurance that they will not lose their livelihood because of a very serious family crisis with their child. I think that we have to put that at the forefront of the discussions that we have in this place.

I do think that the bill has been strengthened through, quite honestly, the co-operation between—as the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has mentioned, we did co-operate and were able to strengthen this legislation. I do think that that speaks to the potential of a minority government, quite honestly.

Member Randy Hillier brought forward the issue of rural and remote communities where doctors can't sign off on these leaves, and so you would have to have a registered nurse or a psychologist, and that's a good recommendation.

We did build some flexibility into it, and so it's a better piece of legislation that is before us today. I look forward to further comments.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I'd like to introduce Katherine Muirhead, who is with the caregiver coalition. I believe that she's on the side there. Thank you very much, for not only all the work that she does but that all the members of the coalition do.

I know there are a lot of people around Ontario who watch this channel on a regular basis, and they must be

wondering: Why is it that if all of the members in the House seem to agree on certain bills—and this is certainly one of them—why don't they just get on with it? So I'm going to tell them exactly what's happening here, from my perspective. We've already had about 20 hours of debate on this bill.

On the one hand, we have the Conservatives, who are saying, "We want each and every member to speak for 20 minutes on this bill"—which would be something like 600 minutes—no, more than that; about 800 minutes—"to just keep talking." That would take about two weeks just on this one bill alone.

On the other hand, we have the NDP saying, "Yes, we want this bill passed. How do we get this done quickly so that it can go off to committee?" There is only one way to do it, and that is through a programming motion, sometimes called time allocation.

Now, here is the real dilemma. The real dilemma is that the NDPs philosophically don't believe in time allocation. The Tories will never vote for time allocation. So instead, we have a bill here, like so many other bills, that will never, ever—well, at least for a long period of time—be dealt with and go on for second and third readings.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's an abuse of process.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's really an abuse of process. You have got the right to speak on this; I realize that. But the work that we're supposed to be doing here, Speaker, just doesn't get done because of the process that is continually happening in this House.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I came in here to listen to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound because he always brings an interesting perspective to it. He tried to relate it to some of the relationships to the budget: jobs and the economy. That's basically what I heard always weaving in and out of his comments.

This bill—a bit of history on it—has been here for a while. It has been here in a different form. I want to commend the government for sort of harmonizing with the federal government, and I mean this sincerely. I think we looked at the changes made federally under the Canada labour code. This bill does many of the things that were suggested in debate.

Initially, the bill was completely inflexible. You had to take a whole week off to take your ill loved one for a chemotherapy treatment. Now, it has at least introduced some flexibilities. I recognize, of course, those people who work in the industry, and I thank them for their commitment to making life better for people in Ontario.

I'm commending the government here, in fairness. It got to committee. It's been amended. You're doing the right thing, but to say for one moment—denying us the right to represent the views of our constituents is simply wrong. It's simply wrong, and you shouldn't use that to expedite—for instance, today I met with people from a group with the acronym NIED. It means the National Initiative for Eating Disorders. This is another case in

health care where it's not recognized under the Mental Health Act, but it affects mainly young women, from what I've been told.

But there's more to be done, and when you're looking at giving people time off, you've got to recognize that the federal government has come in with EI, funding some of those leaves. That's a good thing. Otherwise, it doesn't cost this government one nickel. It requires the employer to hire the replacement person, and that is still to be resolved, how they're going to recognize that under income tax law.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to add some comments to the debate with respect to the bill being discussed here today in third reading. It's not the first time this bill has seen the light of day. When the government had a majority government, at the time, I believe—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: There we are. Thank you very much. It had an opportunity to pass this bill and unfortunately, it didn't happen, and then—

Mrs. Laura Albanese: You wanted it expanded, but the ministry—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay, yes. The Minister of Labour, then Linda Jeffrey, introduced the bill and she wanted to have it passed. Good for her. As the member opposite said, they wanted to expand it. Here we are today.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: You wanted it expanded.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We wanted to expand it. Well, I'll get that right. We wanted to expand it, and good for us, because look at the improvements that we have made to this bill to actually work for people who wanted that time off. Great work, I have to say. If the expansions meant that it got delayed and brought to this House and it went to committee and we changed the definition of who can write the medical leave and how much time you can take off when it's needed—that's actually a great thing to have happened.

I know that the members have talked about the fact that we've gone on and on and on about this bill, but I know, particularly, two people in London, Netty and Wayne, who watch the federal Legislature and they also watch the provincial Legislature; they are always very interested in all the debates that happen. They're kind of legislative junkies who follow around—they're those fans who follow us

I'm just glad this bill has had the opportunity and second time around to have that expansion, because it is a better bill for those discussions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his response.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure. My colleague from Durham stood up and offered some very good insights, as he always does. I just want to say, I want to strive at some point to be as effective a member of this House as Johnny O'Toole.

The Chair of Cabinet also spoke, the former Attorney General, and I have to say, it disheartens me a little bit to hear him saying in a roundabout way that he wants to usurp democracy yet again. Of all people, I would have thought that he should want all of us to have our day, to be able to say what we need to.

I'll use the Green Energy Act as a prime example. They stripped the rights of democracy from our local municipal politicians, and yet they stand here and tell us that we should just steamroll more stuff. I think we're going to pay for that for 20 years. We'll always take our time in here to debate whatever we need to debate and ensure we step up for them.

At any point, we would definitely step aside. We did the last session. We said, "We'll clear the decks of some of this other legislation if we'll be talking about jobs and the economy and the future of our young people. We'll do that any day of the week." This, under the government rule, could have already been in. I spoke about it a year ago. If they truly had it as a priority, I believe it would be done today. I'm not going to stand here and take much from them from the perspective of how they want to, again, steamroll things, because we've seen that they've doubled the debt, they've got a deficit despite record revenues; they still aren't providing the care for people out there in need.

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We heard from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who called me a fast talker. I will take that as a credit. I am a bit of an auctioneer on the side. I figure the number of words per minute—I'm probably getting good value. My constituents are getting good value for money, Mr. Speaker, and I'll continue to do that.

Of course, the member from London–Fanshawe, I think, made a good, credible comment. This is a bill that went through the right process. They brought a terrible bill. We all took a shot at it. We made amendments. We've improved that bill with three-party support. Now, at some point, the vote will come when the time comes, it will be passed and the people of Ontario will be well served.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am now going to add my voice, again, to Bill 21, the family caregiver leave—

Interjection: You've spoken already.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I've just been advised that the member has already spoken to third reading of this bill, just to remind him.

Further debate? The member for Beaches–East York.

Interjection: He has already spoken.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just like to explain the procedure to members. If you'd like to speak, you stand up. The member for Beaches–East York stood up; I recognized him.

Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm somewhat amazed by the normal procedure that—people had the chance to talk in party order, but that's been deviated from here.

Anyway, I wanted a chance to talk to Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence. I think it's an important issue in our society that we're able to stand up and give people who are in their worst nightmares some time to at least not worry about their jobs.

This is a bill that is not going to cost this government anything. They have the ability to make a difference in people's lives. Unfortunately, I think that people in this House—all parties included—know too many people who have gone through such an instance or such a terrifying event. This legislation—there's a real need to provide at least some comfort that at least you know your job will be there after. You're forced, generally, lots of times without any knowledge—an idea that something is going to happen. It could be a car accident; it could maybe be a disease; or it could be something that comes through over a longer period of time. But it's still an issue where people need to be able to not worry about their employment and know that at the end of it, in the case where many of the times they're saving the government money—I mean, they're keeping the person at home, or they're attending to them sometimes in the hospital, but knowing all along that likely the procedures are not going to be successful, and they'll need to have the protection of knowing that their job will be there when they go back.

Speaker, this is not the first time we've seen this legislation through. We talked earlier about Bill 30 that went through, and, of course, it died when the House was prorogued by the former Premier. We all know why that happened. Of course, we went through the cost of the power plant cancellations. There's no arguing here that they were being put in the wrong place—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Point of order: Mr. Speaker, I'd like you to rule on if he is talking on the topic that is being debated today or if he is talking about his own riding. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you for that point of order. I'd ask the member to speak to the bill that's in front of us.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Well, Speaker, I believe that I was talking about the former bill here, Bill 30, that was the same bill, and it's being brought back. From what I heard numerous times this afternoon, it was essentially mainly the same bill.

We were just talking about how this is a government that thought that was an important bill back then. I was giving them some credit that they're bringing it back. I was just talking about the circumstances along with that legislation, which is very similar to the legislation we're seeing today, other than it was one of the many bills that fell off the table when the House was prorogued over the gas plant scandal—something that they talk very much about in my riding. This one resident in my riding said that he had to get his medication for his blood pressure actually doubled because of the issues with this government. Anyway, I know that some of those things aren't

something the government likes to hear, but it's certainly something in my riding that gets talked about a lot.

Speaker, we're very happy that this government brought this bill back—Bill 21—and we were able to get some important amendments through on this bill, because I think that we have a wealth of knowledge on both sides of the House and I think we listen to our constituents every day, so we need to be able to bring back some issues. I know that personally, I sat through a committee where we tried to bring some amendments through, and they were steamrolling—I think that's a good word—because there were no amendments accepted from either one of the opposition parties, even though I thought that they made a lot of sense and it was something that was done in every other jurisdiction of this country that actually had such a bill in place.

We all know that it's important that this bill proceeds. We know that, especially in times of need, people are going to address it. I know that we don't know who will be next, who will need protection from such a bill. When it was first introduced as Bill 30—and I've had two neighbours who actually have suffered this type of a loss; in one case, a good friend of the family where his young daughter, 24 years old, had a relapse into cancer. The lady kept her daughter at home through some very trying times—rehabilitation, lots of operations—and she ended up losing her job because the company couldn't wait any longer; a large company, which would have qualified under this bill. In spite of that, she kept on working and saw things to the bitter end. It's too bad that somebody who is working so hard on trying to help out her daughter—that actually the health system would be penalized in such a way.

Again, unfortunately, just last year, we had another neighbour of ours—a great community leader over the years who spent many years supporting the church, local library, Sir John Johnson House—not feeling well, kept going with some of her volunteer work and actually made it through the local church supper and then went into the hospital, I believe, that week. She was immediately put in intensive care and spent months and her final days going through a system that I would have to say failed her. She spent weeks trying to get testing done—tests were delayed, were not considered a high enough priority. I don't know how a person in intensive care would be bumped by people with higher priorities month after month, and eventually by the time they identified what the issue was, I guess the rest is history.

We want to make sure that we not only have something that protects people when they are working, but we want something that actually protects your lives. We need a health care system that's there and able to respond to people and people's needs and get the proper testing done, so that the proper diagnosis can be done in a timely manner and the treatment can actually start. In this case, it certainly was a sad day for the community and certainly for the family, and this neighbour's husband, Dan—we go back to the ice storm, where we were over 30 days without power—took leave off his work and

helped the township; an electrical engineer who was able to really help at setting up generators, some of the large generators that actually serve some of the villages in town. Really, somebody who came back, and it's just sad to see just what happened.

I'm quite proud of our community, as we have always been one that is there to support. We have two active cases now. We have two young teachers who are battling through. One of them is trying to raise money to get some treatment in the States. So it goes on all the time, and it's somewhere this bill really has a chance to make a difference.

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I'm somewhat taken aback by some of the comments on not allowing the opposition to debate this bill. I think this is very important. I know the member from Etobicoke North stood up and said that we should just push through with this. That's such a stark contrast to some of the work we've done in committee, government agencies, where we sat and tried for four months to release a document on Metrolinx, and three people were allowed to talk over and over and over again, meeting after meeting. I think it's important that we hear debate, but it's got to be reasonable debate. In that case, three members were allowed to repeat every meeting. The goal really was clear: another study that was produced by this government. I'm not sure why the resistance to release it. It's another cost study, so I guess that's a serious problem for this government. Any time there's a cost study or cost project being done, we seem to see issues with it being well overspent.

I want to go on record that we support this bill, and we're glad to see that they were able to make some changes. We think that the bill, in its former version as Bill 30, which people were upset that I mentioned that time—if it had gone through and the House hadn't been prorogued, we would have seen this. It would have made a big difference for the two people I talked about, who just last year and the year before lost a loved one. In one case, she lost her job and was forced to look for another one.

Times can be bad, and I don't think we can't appreciate just how hard they are unless we've been through that. This bill will certainly supply some support. Thank you for speaking on that topic today.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to thank the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry for his thoughtful remarks, and particularly for sharing the experiences of the constituents in his riding and the fact they would have benefited from this legislation a year and two years ago respectively. I think it's also important to note that the member draws out the fact that one of the reasons why this bill is now before the House for a second time is because the government prorogued this Legislature. As a result, this bill died on the order paper. So it's important to take that into consideration as well.

I also just want to add, in terms of the debate, that some other members have mentioned that we are going to

see in the coming days and years—more so, years—that the demographic of our province is shifting, and there are going to be more and more seniors in our province. There's going to be a larger population of elders. The reality is that more and more of us are going to need to care for loved ones as they age. We need to have a serious discussion about what that's going to look like. How can we as a society deal with that growing aging population, and how are we going to be able to take care of them?

The reason why I bring this up is, the family caregiver leave allows for people to take leave for a critically ill family member. More and more, we're seeing that people are critically ill, but they're critically ill with chronic diseases or illnesses. These aren't illnesses that will get better in a week, a couple of weeks or even in a year. These are illnesses that require management that may take multiple years to heal and to deal with. We need to have a very serious discussion about what we can do to create a system that's sustainable that actually can care for people. We need to start having that discussion very soon, because the reality is this question needs to be answered in the upcoming years.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, you may be interested to know that this bill has now had 13 hours of debate. The bill that the House agrees on had 13 hours of debate in second reading and seven hours on third reading. Sixty-nine members have spoken, in one way or another, to this bill. It seems to me, when we have a consensus, in terms of the legislation, that we should be moving forward. This is exactly why the public sees legislative bodies as being gridlocked and not doing their job appropriately.

I really agree: If I were sitting in opposition and I were adamantly opposed to a highly contentious bill, it's quite legitimate to keep the debate going.

This is third reading. When I came to this Legislature 37 years ago, there was no debate on third reading. You had first reading, of course, which is very routine; a fulsome second reading debate; committee; it came back for third reading, and that was it.

It is an absolute abuse of the Legislature to continue on third reading of this. If we were on second reading, I could understand that.

There are pieces of legislation that one of the parties or both parties in opposition may be adamantly opposed to.

I remember that Peter Kormos, on behalf of the trial lawyers of this province, got up and fought against an insurance bill we had, from which, at that time, removed the right to sue for a lot of different things. The lawyers loved him forever for that, the lawyers who were involved with that; some of the victims would have as well. He went on for many, many days. While it may have been inconvenient, I thought that was quite legitimate.

Here we have a piece of legislation we all agree on. We've been to committee with this. There was a chance

to advance opinions at that time and have the public before us. It's time to pass this piece of legislation and debate extensively on other bills, if necessary.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I commend the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for his interest in this issue and his reason and purpose for standing and participating.

I'm quite disappointed by the Minister of the Environment bullying us, basically, into silence. I want to hear from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka—I've heard him speak on this endlessly in caucus: how frustrated he is with how little is being done—and/or the member from Sarnia–Lambton. These are just a couple of the people in my caucus that I'm confident will add value to the debate.

This is simply a copy of the federal legislation. This bill has been around in this form, under Bill 21, since March 2013. It's April 2014. If they wanted to get this done, they have the tools; they have the power; they have the clout. They could get it done. It's my view that they're blaming it all on the federal government because the federal government, under the EI plan and their changes under employment standards Canada, already cover some of this on EI. So it's not costing them a nickel. They are the government. Use the tools and get the job done.

Quit trying to bully us into silence. I can't believe it.

I can hardly wait to speak on this bill. I haven't had nearly enough time to draw attention to specific cases of people with anorexia. That's not covered under this bill. It's not recognized as a treatable—I can only say this: I know the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry was intent on making a point. There are other members in our caucus. I want to hear nothing more about trying to silence this side of the House to make the points of why we support the bill.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting: There's a very philosophical debate happening in this House today about who should be speaking, how long we should be speaking. It does occur to me, though, based on the comments by the Minister of the Environment, that when it suits the Liberals, they don't like the debate to continue. When it suits the Liberals, they can make things happen really quickly. When it suits the Liberal government, they can move things. They had the ability for almost eight years, as a majority government, to make things happen really quickly. Things happened that actually weren't in the best interests of the people of this province during that period of time.

When the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry talks about health care in general—and he spoke, I think, as we all like to do, with great feeling about the people who are in our ridings. When we sit here, we bring all those people with us to this Legislature, and that is as it should be. It does strike me,

though—and this is a consistent theme that I will bring up each and every time—that they've made recommendations on policies and legislation that should have happened over the last two and half years, and yet they've missed opportunity after opportunity, with two budget cycles, to actually impact the legislation that happens in the province of Ontario. Those are missed opportunities. It resonates across the province: When people see politicians come to this Legislature, they want to hear them. They want to hear their concerns reflected in the debate that happens in this House, but they also want to see those politicians do some work and make sure that things get done during the budget process—especially in the new reality, which is a minority government.

It has taken us some time. I think that we have weathered through two very productive budget sessions, and yet the members, including the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, have missed those opportunities, which, quite honestly, is quite unfortunate.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I want to thank the speakers who stood up to comment on my brief chance to talk about Bill 21.

The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton on the issue of prorogation—I think that was well put. We're back here for that reason. Certainly the aging population is a concern and I think one thing that really highlights the need for this bill.

I was quite shocked, as the member from Durham was, to hear the comments about really trying to push things through. I think we've seen a government that has put through bills that have hurt this economy, and it was interesting to hear their finance minister talk just last week, saying that he predicts Ontario's real gross domestic product will average 2.1% between 2014 and 2035—that's 20 years—compared to the US, nationally, the other provinces, and globally; we're going to lag behind the rest of the world, essentially. Do you know what the problem was? He blamed it on the aging population, which is a problem that most of these countries that are ahead of us are suffering from as well.

I think, really, the problem is 10 years of this Liberal government. We see companies leaving all the time because we're no longer competitive—high hydro rates, high payroll taxes. People are leaving. Unfortunately, around home, we're close to the New York State border and you pick up advertisements from them advertising, "Come across, save money." Lower hydro rates, low property taxes; this is where we are failing.

That's why we have a problem with letting this government pass any more legislation. We've offered, if they are going to deal with the jobs, to actually work with them, but they refuse to deal with jobs. So we're afraid of what the next legislation will be because it's obviously going to be detrimental to the people of Ontario and the

people in my riding, who say that they can take no more from this government.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a pleasure to stand. I'd like to preface my remarks because a great many comments are being made here today about this bill and about passing this bill, and I think probably all members of the Legislature will want to pass this bill in the fullness of time. I don't think there's any question at all that this bill will probably get unanimous approval when it comes to a vote, whether that be today or tomorrow or next week. It's not going to take a whole long time for it to actually get in front of us, but I must take some umbrage at some of the statements that are being made here today.

The opposition obviously has a right to make comment on a bill, whether it's at first or second or third reading. Certainly, the opposition had a right and did the correct thing in making amendments to this bill, because this bill was not in very good shape on a number of serious points. But here we are, standing up, and the Minister of the Environment and the former Attorney General and now the minister responsible for cabinet are saying, "No, just pass this bill. Just do this, and just do this." This place is a place where we try to listen to each other, or we should try to listen to each other. There are many, many bills; this is a good one, but there are other good bills that are before this House that never even get this far because the reality of this House, of this Legislature, is that only the government can bring a bill forward to third reading. The government, in its wisdom, has decided to bring this particular bill forward for third reading.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And then they complain about it.

Mr. Michael Prue: And then certainly has complaints when the opposition wants to talk about it.

I think that the opposition, as well, has legitimate complaints about those bills that are not brought forward for third reading; those bills that have gone through the committee process, that are every bit as far advanced as this bill was, before it was called back for third reading, and the government sits there and refuses to call them. Some of them are opposition bills; some of them are bills that the opposition has put forward themselves; some of them are just bills that the opposition agrees so fundamentally with that we want them to be brought forward, and this government chooses not to.

This is not a one-sided debate, ministers. This is not a one-sided debate. If the government expects co-operation in all things in this House and that the opposition ought not to debate certain bills and should pass them because we are in agreement, then certainly that flows the other way, too. Certainly that flows, that when the opposition wants a bill that the government agrees to, the government should bring it forward for third reading. A little bit of give and take in this Legislature would go a long way, and I have not witnessed that, and it's very easy to witness.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, just briefly, for 30 seconds at the most, I would like to talk about two bills

that certainly stick in my craw and stick in the craw of the members of the New Democratic Party.

My colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has a bill that's going to help child actors. That bill has gone right through first reading and second reading and gone to committee. It was extensively changed by the Liberals, particularly by the Minister of Labour. It is ready to come back for third reading, yet the government won't call it back. I also have a bill that has had the same problem. My bill is Bill 49, to deal with servers and tips so that the servers get to keep the tips that are intended for them and they're not siphoned into the pockets of their employers. That has gone all the way through and is waiting to be called back as well. But the government doesn't call those bills back for third reading because they're not government bills, even though every single member on that side of the House has voted for both of those bills, both in this House and in committee, and they're ready to go.

If the government wants some kind of co-operation on this bill or a bill like it, then maybe the government should start doing something that's reasonable in this House so that we can all maybe get along a little bit better, because we need to get along better.

This is a good bill. This is a bill that should pass and should pass rapidly. But when you come into a place that the government tries to control, and they won't let the opposition voice the positions they have and won't hear them out on bills of other magnitude which they think are important as well, then this is the result. If the result is that it's not proceeding as quickly as the government might wish today, I think the government ought to look at themselves first as to why it's not proceeding rather than blaming the opposition members for speaking to the bill.

I only have 10 minutes. I don't even think I'm going to use the whole 10 minutes. This is a good bill that needs to pass. It is a good bill because it's going to provide support for family members who need that support. It is in conjunction with other bills that we have passed in recent history that also provide support to family members when they need it and are able to maintain their employment, to go back to their employment. Certainly, it is intended to help Ontarians to weather the storms of life. Life is not always kind. Life does not always lead you where you're supposed to go. People get sick, people die, children go missing—all kinds of things happen all the time. This bill is going to help.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about at least two small points. The bill going to committee was a good thing. The bill going to committee changed two things.

It changed the amount of time that a person can take off; they don't need to take it in one-week blocks. They can take it a day or two at a time. They can take it afternoons only if that's the way they need it. The government fought that tooth and nail; they opposed it. Even in committee, they took the side of some employers who thought that this was going to be difficult or problematic to implement rather than taking the side of families and individuals who thought that this was going to work out

better for them when they only amass an amount of eight weeks a year and considering that they could take it little dribs and drabs at a time in order to accomplish their family's needs. The government opposed that. Thankfully, I don't hear any opposition to that in third reading.

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The second thing was the serious medical condition. This has been amended to include chronic or episodic issues. For example, I think it's going to now include such things as dementia, epilepsy and recurring MS, which it wasn't going to before. I give kudos to all sides of the House: to the government for bringing it forward, but to the opposition as well, for making those amendments and carrying it through in committee to make a good bill a better bill.

Now, back to the ministers who spoke about getting this pushed forward: I would be happy to vote on it as soon as it comes up for a vote, after all of us who need to speak have spoken. But I also ask the government to try to bring back some of the bills from the opposition parties, and see how we can make this place more collegial and actually get things done. That's the day that the Legislature is going to work the way it should.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to add my comments to Bill 21. I actually first spoke to this bill when it was called Bill 30, and we were referencing that earlier in the debate. I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour at the time, and I shepherded that bill through the House then.

It has gone through a lot of changes. Good changes have happened since then. We have taken the time to talk about it: then, because it was being spoken to intensively by a number of members; and after the government brought it back. It has been through second reading. It has been through committee, through full days of committee, as we mentioned. Many changes have happened, good changes.

But now it has been, I believe, over 20 hours of debate. I do respect the democratic right of each member to speak to a bill. At the same time, I'm very cognizant of the families who are waiting. This bill could make a difference in their lives sooner rather than later. If we pass it for third reading now, if we could move forward, then we can help families now.

Again, yes, we all want to have and exercise our democratic right, but at the same time, we have to also be very mindful of the people who we represent and the difference we can make in their lives.

As far as private members' bills are concerned—and I refer to the member from Beaches—East York—even government members have bills. My private member's bill has gone through second reading. It still has to go through committee. So yes, it's a give-and-take.

But this one, we all agree upon. We have over 70 members who have spoken to it. I think that because we're all in agreement, and because families are waiting, we have to make a difference.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I always listen with intentness to my colleague from Beaches–East York, and that's not because of the M&M's that he apparently gives out in his office and which I haven't made it down there to have yet.

He made a very valid point, I think, about the ability for all of us to work together and actually do what this House and what we are all sent here to do.

I'm going to just deviate a little bit from him for a minute, because the Minister of the Environment said something a little bit ago about us abusing the power of this House. I think that's a little bit fresh, coming from a government that has two criminal investigations going against it, that wasted \$1.2 billion that isn't going to health care, isn't going to help the people of this great province—the eHealth boondoggle, and I can go on and on.

We have said, throughout the two and a half years I have been here, to bring substantive bills to this House, like the jobs. We brought the Million Jobs Act to the floor of this House to debate. There are a million people unemployed.

We have brought debates here about—they've got record revenues, and they continue—someone was talking about how they like to do things fast in this House. Well, what they did in a fast eight years is, they doubled the debt of this great province. Why aren't we talking about that more in this House? Why are they not prepared to bring those types of issues to the table to debate and have a fulsome debate?

At the end of the day, I'm taken a little bit aback. The Minister of the Environment has been here a lot longer than me, but at the end of the day, I think that one was a little fresh even for him to bring up, when we're doing all this.

To my colleague from Beaches–East York: I do believe there is an ability here for us to work together collaboratively, to bring the best, and I think this bill is indicative of that. It was a terrible bill when it was brought. It was rushed, like many of the things the Liberals have tried to do. We took it to committee, which is where it needed to go, to have those amendments that we brought forward as a collective, and now it's going to be a stronger bill. We do need to get it to the vote. We do need to get it out there, because at the end of the day, we're here to put legislation that will serve the people of Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Beaches–East York, because he just brings the history and the context of the way that this place, the Legislature, works.

I think the most salient point that he made is that only governments can bring forward bills to third reading. Personally, I haven't made it through the entire House of Commons procedures and policies yet, so I think I had

forgotten that, but now it rings so false to see the members of the government stand up and complain about us debating this piece of legislation.

I do think that there are very good pieces of legislation that are sitting in the queue, that are waiting. What a wonderful thing it would be for this minority government to actually extend sort of a collaborative and co-operative attitude to seeing some of those pieces make it through the Legislature in a very expedient way.

That said, definitely, Bill 21 deserves our full attention and our full debate. We have worked together to try to strengthen it and make it better, and I think that's a good exercise in democracy. It is a good example that minority governments can work. I think that we should try to lead by example.

I think also, though—when I first came, I only sat here for 11 days before prorogation happened, so it's really personal for me—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Oh, what?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know, I know. When the then-Premier prorogued this Parliament to run away from a certain issue that, quite honestly, sort of discombobulated the whole province, I brought forward a bill limiting the powers of prorogation. It's sitting there. It's a beautiful piece of legislation, actually. It really is. It needs our full attention, because I feel that perhaps there's a ghost of prorogation coming into the building now. I feel people are getting uncomfortable. So I would welcome further debate on the issue of prorogation as well.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill 21.

Interjections.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to hear that my colleagues opposite are pleased for me to stand to speak in support of Bill 21.

We know that this bill has been debated for 13 hours during second reading and another seven hours in third reading, for a total of almost 20 hours. Over 70 members of the Legislature have either spoken in support of the bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments.

Most importantly, I heard attentively this afternoon the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound say, “We're here to serve the people.” I also heard the member from Beaches–East York speak so eloquently, always with passion, about working collectively and collegially, about bringing private members'—I totally get it. I really agree with the member from Beaches–East York. So at the end of the day, if we all support Bill 21 and we're here to serve the people, I need to challenge my colleague opposite, saying, “What next?” Ontarians, we know, are waiting for us to pass Bill 21. At the end of the day, individuals and families are waiting patiently to see us supporting them but also improving their lives, because at the end of the day, this bill will improve the lives of Ontarians, and that's what it's all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Beaches–East York has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to thank the members from York South–Weston, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Kitchener–Waterloo and Scarborough–Agincourt for actually listening to my speech. All of you referred to things that I had said. That is sometimes, Mr. Speaker—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Rare.

Mr. Michael Prue: —rare in this place. Oftentimes, the two-minute hits are used to score points and counter-points rather than to actually comment on what the person making the speech had to say.

To my two Liberal colleagues: Yes, I think that this place can work far better than it does. I think everybody in this entire room knows that if there was more of a feeling of collegiality, as used to exist in this Legislature back 37 years ago when the environment minister first arrived—he will tell you that this place was a much more collegial place, that members on opposite sides used to go out for dinner together; they used to go to parties together; they used to talk together; they used to understand that, “We can spend a lot of time on a contentious bill, and let’s pass four or five of these that we all agree with,” and it was done.

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That is not what happens in here anymore. Would that it did, because a bill like this—we should not be spending a long time on the bill. The long time needed to be spent in committee to make the amendments that were made—now that those amendments have been made, and it appears that all parties have agreed with those amendments, then we should get on with it. I don’t have any difficulty in saying that.

I am hoping that we don’t hear an enormous number of speeches. But I do want it on the record—I felt compelled to speak, because I did not have a chance to speak to it at second-level debate, and I did want my voice to be heard on how important I think this legislation is and how it needs to be passed.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to have the opportunity to speak today to Bill 21, which is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence.

I should point out that I’m wearing my Ontario tartan today because yesterday, April 6, was Tartan Day. The member from Wellington–Halton Hills actually did a member’s statement earlier today to bring attention to Tartan Day.

There is a lot that has been said about the speed with which this bill is moving through the legislature. It should be pointed out that it doesn’t seem to be a huge priority of the government, because they actually introduced this bill for first reading on March 5, 2013, and then it wasn’t until September 25, 2013, that second reading debate occurred. Then, of course, it was referred to the Standing Committee on General Government and was reported back to the Legislature on November 7, 2013. Obviously, a lot of time has passed until now, and we’re just finally in third reading debate on the bill.

It has also been pointed out that originally this bill was Bill 30, and then the Legislature prorogued when former Premier McGuinty stepped aside. That causes all bills that are on the order paper to die. By the sounds of things, with Bill 30, that is perhaps a good thing, because there was a lot of criticism of Bill 30, and this Bill 21 is a significant improvement over Bill 30.

I think it’s worth noting also that when you look at a copy of Bill 21, the copy we now have before us, it shows all the stroked-out parts that have been amended, and it has been significantly amended, significantly improved, so that now it looks like there is all-party support of the bill. That’s a good thing.

I did want to discuss a few things that are relevant to my constituents. I’ll start with one part that came up when a company in the Muskoka area brought it to my attention—a larger company, that employs a couple of hundred people.

Currently, there are only two leaves available to workers in Ontario that are protected under the Employment Standards Act. One is family medical leave, which is unpaid, job-protected leave for up to eight weeks in a 26-week period. For you to be eligible for that one, a qualified health practitioner must issue a certificate stating that the individual to be cared for has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks. Under the federal Employment Insurance Act, six weeks of employment insurance benefits may be paid to EI-eligible employees under this leave.

The other type, and that’s the one I wanted to talk about, is personal emergency leave. Some employees have the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid, job-protected leave each calendar year due to illness, injury, and certain other emergencies and urgent matters. This is only eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

A Muskoka-based company brought this issue to my attention, saying that, in their case, they were having employees abuse that specific provision. This winter has been a good example: It’s been a great year for ice fishing and it seems that some employees have been using their 10 days, which are supposed to be for urgent means, to—a good thing to do in Parry Sound–Muskoka is to go ice fishing—but obviously that has created some problems for the company. They wanted to bring that to my attention. I don’t know what the exact solution, necessarily, is to that, but I just wanted to make the point that that is a concern.

This bill that we have before us now is Bill 21. Really, what it’s about is allowing caregivers to focus on what matters most; that is, caring for loved ones without the risk of losing their job.

It’s worth pointing out that there is no provincial cost to this bill.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I would simply say that for most good employers, where you have an employee who has some family emergency—a parent, a child, whatever—I think most companies don’t need a law to tell

them that their employee should have time off work and not risk losing their job. However, there are some employers who do need this law so that their employees are safe, and they don't have to worry when they have to care for a loved one that they may lose their job.

I think it was the member from the Simcoe North who also brought up small business and the fact that if you have a relatively small business—especially for the owners of the companies—many of these rules we create don't, in a practical sense, apply to them.

I can think of my own situation, owning a small resort in Muskoka. I had a couple of accidents over the 25-odd years that I ran the resort. On one occasion, I pulled my thumb off on a power takeoff—I was trying to attach a snow blower to a tractor. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, as the owner of the company, at that point, basically, it doesn't matter what you've done; if you can, you still go to work. Luckily, it was our slower time of year because it was in December. I was getting ready for the winter season. I can tell you that (a) there was no WSIB that applied to the owners in those days, so you were kind of on your own financially, and (b) you still have to work. So I remember trying to learn to write with my left hand. I got a lot of cheques written that didn't look very good as I tried to write with my left hand. I just went about continuing to work.

I think that's a good point the member from Simcoe North makes about small businesses and the effect on them, where they have a couple of critical employees.

I can think of another circumstance: My father passed away on July 21, 2000. That happened to be right at the peak of our summer season at our resort, and all I can say is, thank goodness for wonderful employees. In that case, I think I took a couple of days off for my father's funeral and the preparations for that, but that's just what you do when you're in business for yourself. That is, I'm sure, the case for many thousands of small businesses around this province.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has been improved dramatically since it was originally Bill 30. I think it's safe to say that the government didn't do a lot of consultation the first time around, so there are significant improvements. There's an addition of chronic and episodic illnesses. There are new types of leave. There's the family caregiver leave, which is up to eight weeks' unpaid leave. There's the critically ill child care leave, which is up to 37 weeks, and there is the crime-related child death or disappearance leave, which is up to 104 weeks—a terrible situation of that happening, where one's child dies as a result of a crime—and there is also up to 52 weeks for employees whose child disappears—another hard-to-imagine scenario. Mr. Speaker, it has been improved. It also brings Ontario legislation in line with federal legislation that was passed some time ago.

1700

I think there are still some deficiencies, like having to take a minimum of one week, which I understand is still the case. So even if you just need a day to take a loved one to the doctor's office—and this is particularly true in

a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, where in most cases you have to drive to either Bracebridge, Huntsville or Parry Sound to a hospital or farther afield if it's more serious, like the Royal Victoria hospital in Barrie. In many cases, there's driving involved.

Also, you don't know when this illness is going to happen. There is often no notice.

I can see I'm running out of time. I'll maybe talk about that in my two minutes, but I think flexibility is certainly needed in the way this is implemented. Perhaps, as we go through implementing and seeing it in real life, there will need to be changes made.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I spoke earlier about the notion that as our aging or our senior demographic is increasing, as our population is aging, family caregiver leave will become more and more important. In fact, the idea of caring for ill family members will become more and more important. I said that we needed to have a serious conversation about what we can do as a government, as a society, to ensure that, as folks age and become ill, we are able to care for them as a society.

I also wanted to touch on the notion that many of the illnesses and the critical illnesses that people are facing these days are not acute. They're actually chronic and long-term. Many of these chronic, critical, long-term illnesses are preventable.

So while we talk about the idea of a caregiver leave to make sure that we care for these people who are these loved ones who are ill, we also need to have a serious conversation about what we can do to prevent the illness in the first place. I think our discussion needs to involve prevention. In particular, our society right now has set barriers between people and healthy living.

One of the slogans that I think is one of the most powerful in describing where we need to go with health promotion and prevention of illness is making the healthy choice the easier choice. I think we need to have a serious discussion about how we can make the healthy choices easier, because as it stands, it's easier to eat food that is not nutritious, that is packed with empty calories—sugar, salt and fat—and it's much harder to buy organic fresh fruits and produce.

In addition to this idea of having access to nutritious food, there's also a barrier to physical activity. We need to ensure that physical activity is something that can be promoted so that people don't get ill and so that less people need care when they are critically ill.

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I heard with interest the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton speaking about the need for us to make it easier to live a healthy lifestyle. I couldn't agree with him more. I believe that our government has done a lot in this area, whether it's encouraging people to eat Ontario-grown food, whether it's posting calories in fast food restaurants or whether it's our fitness programs through the schools, the healthy kids program.

We are doing a lot, an unprecedented amount, in terms of trying to make it easier for Ontarians to live healthily.

In terms of this bill, I hear that all sides support it, so I'm just going to say, let's move on. Let's vote for it. It has had unprecedented debate: 13 hours during second reading and eight hours at third reading, for a total of 21 hours. Every side had a chance in committee to make recommendations to make this a better bill. What is left now? It has gone through committee. All the changes that could have been made or should have been made—we have all had an opportunity.

We all agree it's a good bill, so why don't we just now pass it so that Ontarians can go ahead and help their families? It makes no sense to me. So all I'm going to ask is: Let's stop talking; let's start doing. It's more important to do than talk.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to get up and comment on the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. He always brings such insightful details about any legislation or about his riding. It's interesting that he talked about people in his riding who really had to go to work even though they were hurt. I talked to somebody in my riding, a local storeowner, Stephane Levac, who tore his Achilles tendon. If you went to the store the next day you found him with his leg in a shopping cart getting around because he had to work. He's the local butcher and he had no choice; he was the only employee there. So there is a lot of hardship.

The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and the barriers to healthy living—I think he has got that bang on.

I'm somewhat surprised by the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville when she talks about debate on any subject, because I sat in government agencies, where she talked over and over—you know, 20 minutes and then another 20 minutes—about a report just to release a document that this government had on Metrolinx. It really made everybody wonder: What is in the document that they're so afraid to see released? “The government is so transparent”: I hear that all the time from the Premier. But the transparency level we've seen over and over again, whether it be the power plants or Ornge—really, I would have to say that committee was a record. Four months for a vote just to release a document. We finally gave in to their amendments. It was just another amendment.

But I think when we talk about the need to move on, people in my riding are just afraid of what they might move on to next. We've seen a government that just killed our economy. Their Minister of Finance is saying, “Don't worry. In 20 years we're going to be back to where the rest of our competitors are.” I mean, that's a scary thought when your own Minister of Finance gives that type of forecast—certainly, dark days in Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I did listen intently, actually, to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I share the

compliments that some of the members of this House have bestowed upon him. He always makes it personal. He tells an emotional story and how it connects to the legislation. The points, particularly for me today, are resonating around parents who are facing critically ill children, because I know of a family today that is struggling throughout this entire day with a very difficult decision, and a piece of legislation like this would ease their mind, would take that additional level of worry and would perhaps help them navigate through what is a very complex health issue.

I know that we are going to get to passing Bill 21. That is going to happen. But the member has said that at second reading we had 13 hours. Well, at second reading, that's where we debated the need for flexibility and the fact that we shouldn't tie down the one week. At second reading we talked about the need to have other signatories sign off so that people can actually get the time off. She talks about this 20 hours; quite honestly, it's the government that called the bill to this place. It is our right and our responsibility to debate it and discuss it, and that is what we are doing.

I think the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka made some excellent points. Just because a piece of legislation gets to this point in the Legislature doesn't mean that it's done. It means that we are signalling—

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's third reading. It's third reading.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know it's third reading. That's why we're here—third reading. We have a responsibility, actually, to people in our ridings and to bring those voices to this place so that they know that we still have some outstanding issues with it, even though it does a small amount. It's almost like you want to do the least amount. For the life of me, I can't understand why you've adopted this strategy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. I return to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for their comments.

I'll start with the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. He was talking about the fact that there is an aging demographic in ill family members. The point where I ended up in my comments was talking about the need for flexibility, that perhaps how you take one week is problematic. As an example, I just learned today that my mother went into hospital. Unfortunately, I'm here, so I'm not able to look after her, but my wife and sister, I'm sure, are checking up on her, and hopefully it's not too serious. My point is, we had no advance warning. This happened today. I'm sure that's the case with many of these situations. Having some flexibility is certainly important.

1710

Also, the members from Mississauga East–Cooksville and Bramalea–Gore–Malton were talking about the need

for physical activity, and I would certainly agree with them, which is why I had a private member's bill to pave shoulders in the province, which would make it safer to cycle in the province of Ontario. That's, of course, the main reason people don't cycle on a regular basis: They're worried about their safety. This is a move to try to make it safer in more places around the province, so people can get out and take advantage of the beautiful places to ride around the province of Ontario and safely get some exercise.

I'm pleased to have had the chance to speak to this today.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm happy to rise to speak to this bill again. When I last spoke to it, I think it was Bill 30, back on December 8, 2011. At that point, the government chose not to save this bill as they prorogued to go off and find a new leader of the Liberal Party. It's almost two and a half years in the working. If it was such an important bill for the government, they would have brought it back more quickly after prorogation and they would have moved it along more quickly when they introduced it the second time.

We're being chastised a little bit here for getting up and continuing to debate. In fact, just today I heard a number of important things that actually came from the various speakers, which made me want to get up and speak to this issue again. Every time somebody comes up with some comments on this bill and other bills, it leads me to more questions, perhaps, or more improvements.

The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton talked about seniors, and I think the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka did, as well. As they get into their 80s, seniors sometimes become very fragile. Much like kids, they can get sick very quickly, but they don't necessarily rebound as quickly as children do—but they can. I can use my own mother as an example. She got the flu and got severely dehydrated within 24 hours. It meant a trip to the emergency department, where she stayed for eight or 10 hours, and then needed to come home and needed to have a caregiver for a period of time. I think we're going to see more and more of those instances as people age in our families and in our communities.

Unfortunately, you don't have any advance warning. What happens if you don't have advance warning, and what if you don't need five days off? I think I spoke to this a couple of times in the House. I was happy to see the legislation change, to move from an eight-week block down to one week, but I think there still needs to be more flexibility. Maybe you only need one or two days.

I can tell you, in the years that I actually represented nurses for the Ontario Nurses' Association—this reminds me of the story of sick notes. A nurse would go off sick or a hospital worker would go off sick, and they were ready to come back to work in 24 hours or 48 hours, but because they couldn't get a sick note signed to come back to work, then they might be off for four or five days, because they weren't allowed back without having

that sick note completed. This is kind of the reverse: You have to have somebody sign off to actually make it eligible for you to be off for caregiver leave.

Somebody spoke about small businesses and the impact of this particular legislation on small business. There are many small businesses in Niagara and across this province where they maybe only have one or two employees. Certainly, that's the case when I've been out meeting with small business in my community. They might be able to tolerate one of their two employees being off for a day or two, but they may not be able to tolerate a full week. In that case, would the employee be denied the time off, or would she have to be sitting out there even though she didn't need to stay off?

The member from Beaches–East York talked about the important bills that the other parties have sitting in the queue. I can tell you, I see that list on a regular basis, and it gets longer and longer.

The member from Hamilton Mountain has the Ombudsman oversight of family and children's services. That bill has been introduced in this Legislature time and time again—still waiting for the government to bring that one forward. What can be more important than protecting children in our province?

Hon. James J. Bradley: He's very busy, that Ombudsman.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes.

The child actors bill, we talked about that, from the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I'm going to be the Speaker one of these days; I almost have them all memorized. What can be more important than children actors and making sure that they're not being worked—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Overworked.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —overworked—being required to work overtime, or not having the appropriate rest periods?

Then the member from Beaches–East York's tip-out bill is sitting. All parties have agreed to it, everybody is happy, and the amendments were all made—much like the child actors bill. But it's still sitting there. So we have all kinds of workers across this province—hundreds of thousands of restaurant and bar workers—

Mr. Michael Prue: Taxis.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —taxi drivers—who are still sharing their tips with their managers because the government hasn't brought forth that legislation. Why aren't they doing it? These are important bills as well. Instead, they keep bringing the same bills time and time again.

I'll go to the example of enforcement. That is going to be a huge issue with this legislation. It's a huge issue already under the Employment Standards Act. I'll use the example of time off to vote in a provincial election or in a federal election. I think, provincially, you have to have three consecutive hours off to vote during the election period, and federally maybe it's four hours, or vice versa.

You don't know how many grievances I filed in 20 years for nurses because there is no enforcement of that legislation. We would tell the employer up front, "Yes, these people work 12-hour shifts. They need to have

three hours or four hours off work so that they can actually go and exercise their democratic right to vote.” Lo and behold, it wasn’t enforced, they wouldn’t be given the time off, there would be a big fight, an argument, and we’d file grievances—more cost to the taxpayer in the system.

We also talked about ill children. I think the member from the Kitchener–Waterloo actually talked about that. I know in my own riding, I am dealing in my constituency office with a mother who has a child with a chronic leukemia. She’s spending days after days at McMaster in Hamilton with her child. She hasn’t been able to go to work, but she doesn’t get paid if she doesn’t go to work, so this bill is not going to help her one iota. They’re struggling with their bills, and they’re struggling with their mortgage payments. So although this bill will give some opportunity to some people who have the ability to take some time off because, financially, they’re able to, many people will not be able to.

Enforcement is such a huge issue under the Employment Standards Act in many other areas. I don’t know whether anybody ever read the booklet that came out a while back from the Workers Action Centre. They actually had surveyed workers across the province, and so many of them reported that they never even got their severance pay. I think it was something like 43% of people who either were terminated from a job, or the business closed down, who didn’t get their severance pay, and there was no enforcement around that issue. At the time, I think the Liberal government had actually cut about \$6 million out of enforcement, so clearly, there aren’t enough enforcement officers here in the province to deal with the current legislation that is in place. I don’t know how they’re actually going to deal with this kind of diverse population with so many businesses here in the province.

1720

I think that the last piece I want to speak to is the fact that in my community, there was a business called Vertis. It was in Stevensville, actually, which is part of the Niagara Falls riding, which the member from Niagara Falls now represents.

Vertis was there for about 40 years. It was owned by a US company, and they went bankrupt. These workers—100 in the factory, I think, and another 30 in the office—found themselves out of work. Today, they still have not received their severance pay. There is no legislation to protect them. The company actually filed for bankruptcy in the US.

They’re not entitled to the workers’ employment protection program federally. The provincial government has done nothing to assist them. The federal government has done nothing to assist them. They’re owed \$3.2 million. There is no enforcement around issues such as that, either.

I can’t see the clock. Is it—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Fifteen seconds.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Okay, I have 15 seconds left.

Although, yes, the bill is important and, yes, all parties are likely going to support it, I think that we need to continue to highlight the areas where legislation is actually lacking.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I’m happy to speak on Bill 21, Leaves to Help Families. This bill is simply about compassion, and it’s a very important piece of legislation. This bill helps Ontarians who have a family member with a serious medical condition and who are missing out on the time they need to be with their loved ones. This bill helps families with critically ill children, so that they are not forced to choose between work and care. This bill is also about those families whose children were murdered or have gone missing and who are forced to endure their pain while they are at their desks.

I don’t understand why the opposition parties are needlessly extending debate on Bill 21. This bill has now been debated for 13 hours during second reading and eight hours at third reading, for a total of 21 hours. Over 72 members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments.

This bill is a very important piece of legislation. It’s about time that we pass this legislation. I’m calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling and help us pass this important piece of legislation.

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

Mr. John O’Toole: I always like to listen to the member from Welland because she brings a very practical attitude towards it, and I think she speaks quite genuinely and sincerely. I like, more poignantly, the story she told of the mother who is having to take time off, unpaid, to look after her child with leukemia.

It just shows that this bill is—when you look at what is being done federally, as was mentioned by the previous person commenting for two minutes, the federal government has family medical leave, except it did not include the provision of a significant risk of death in a 26-week period. They also have job-protected leave for up to 37 weeks. In both cases, those are unpaid leaves.

It’s important to note that the government means well, that the job would be protected, but if you have no income, as the member from Welland said, you’re exposed to a lot of risk. A family that is already suffering the stress of a child, in the example that was used there—but often, that’s very much the case. The family is disrupted; the family is stressed. Nothing in this bill is going to look to the whole fairness of replacing the income unless they have a benevolent employer. The federal government has stepped in to strengthen the employment insurance provision, and that is what is being mimicked here in Bill 21.

I endorse her comments. We support the bill. It has been amended. But to suggest for a moment how many hours we have or haven’t spoken to it—we want to be on the record. Compassion isn’t owned by the Liberal

government. You should know that. We want to put the real stories of human tragedies from our ridings on the record. Please give us that opportunity, if you don't listen to any other thing we say.

Thank you for the opportunity here today.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I always enjoy listening to the member from Welland. She brings a great wealth of knowledge, from her background as a registered nurse and being involved in the workforce and fighting for workers' rights, in her expertise.

One of the things I find passing strange is that, of course, this bill was brought to the Legislature last fall. When the Liberal government prorogued for their leadership race it dropped off the order paper, and now it's back again.

We talked about the block of time off that the original bill had, that we're forcing workers to take a week at a time, or more than the time that may be required. What I question is why is it that, if the government actually talked to businesses and small businesses and stakeholders, they wouldn't have brought that concern forward, because I know during the committee period that they certainly did. They brought that concern forward—especially small businesses—that they would rather have a flexible amount of time off for their employees, so that it wouldn't impact the small business with an absentee employee for extended periods of time. We know that when someone is ill, it's unpredictable, so that absence could be something that's unpredictable and needed right away, and therefore perhaps the employer can't plan; whereas, if staff are taking vacation time, usually they give some notice and that gap can be filled and the employer can prepare.

It's just kind of passing strange that when the bill was originally presented why that flexibility wasn't in that bill before.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I've been sitting here listening to this debate on and off this afternoon. I must admit that there are days when I sit here and I feel a little bit like Alice in Wonderland.

I think everybody's acknowledged that we've had second reading already, that that took 13 hours, and that's fine; that it then went to committee and we had whatever amendments the three parties—or two out of the three, as the case may be—could agree on at committee. Now it's come back for third reading.

The thing I find really, really strange, Speaker—because, Speaker, you know the rules around here—is that it has already been amended. The bill says what it says. We either pass it the way it is or we don't pass it the way it is. But what I keep hearing over and over and over again is, “Well, you should change this, or you should change that, or you should change something else.” The truth of the matter is, it's already been to committee, and committee is where we change things. There's actually

no opportunity at third reading to change the bill. It is—you vote for it—or it isn't—you don't vote for it.

We've spent eight hours talking about something none of us has the capacity to change. So we've had 21 hours of debate in this place, and what I find really strange is that the objection I just heard from over there was: “Why do we keep calling the same bill? Why don't we move on with some other bills that the NDP care about?” Well, because we haven't passed this one. If we pass this one, we can move on to another bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the members from Mississauga–Brampton South, Durham, London–Fanshawe and Guelph.

The member from Beaches–East York says he remembers that song, “Go Ask Alice”—the member from Guelph said she felt like Alice in Wonderland, but he said it reminded him of the White Rabbit song, “Go Ask Alice.”

I know there is no further opportunity to amend the bill, but certainly there's an opportunity to raise red flags here as part of the debate. That's what I intended to do.

1730

I guess the biggest question for me is, how is this legislation actually going to be implemented, how is it going to be monitored and how is it going to be enforced? There are many part-time people working in minimum wage jobs in precarious employment here in this province who won't be able to take advantage of this particular legislation.

The Liberal government needs to be on the case of the federal government to try to get some payment in place for this legislation, like other pieces of leaves of absence under the Employment Standards Act. Frankly, the government could have called this bill for third reading as early as November 18 of last year but chose not to do that.

The ESA piece, I think, is very important, because we've heard from many workers in this province that there are overtime violations. There are unpaid wages. There are severance pay obligations and there are vacation pay obligations that currently the government is not enforcing. It isn't 2% or 3%; it is sometimes 73% of the people who reported to the survey who are saying they didn't get their vacation pay or they didn't get their severance pay.

I was happy to participate in the debate. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the PC caucus and my constituents to speak on this important bill this afternoon. Our party supports this bill and has been on record for quite some time indicating our support, as well as our leader, Tim Hudak.

At the heart of this bill is the desire to allow Ontario's caregivers to focus on what matters most—the health and

well-being of their loved ones—without having to fear losing their jobs.

As we continue with the third reading debate, I would like to thank all of my fellow colleagues in the Legislature for their thoughtful comments and for bringing up further issues for discussion. I've had the pleasure of speaking to this bill at a couple of different readings. Addressing this issue is one I feel strongly about.

Mr. Speaker, this bill talks about some of the most difficult and traumatic experiences a family or individual could be faced with, and it talks a great deal about the ability of government and opposition parties to show compassion and to understand these situations.

While there is no question we support the intent of the bill, we'd also like to indicate that it is a shame that there is financial devastation that occurs sometimes because of these situations, and that hasn't been addressed in this legislation and probably couldn't be.

Having said that, it's a step in the right direction towards helping families out in times of most critical need. This debate shouldn't be about whether an individual or family should take a leave—often, in many cases, it is needed—but rather we need to focus on how we can help them in creating options for how they can be there for their loved ones without fear of losing their employment.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 would not incur any additional cost provincially. It would just protect the job of the individual from being terminated. Of course, we're interested in putting families first. I think we all know families, or have had family members, who have faced personal health issues and can certainly understand why this bill is important.

I can speak personally. I know that my wife's father for a number of years was critically ill in hospital in London. She took time off. She had a full-time job at the time, and she took vacation time and unpaid time. She felt it was important and it was her place to be with him, at that time and with her mother, of course. Like she has said, she has never regretted that time that she spent there with him. It's time you never get back.

She was fortunate. She had an employer that would allow her the time, and she used up all of her options.

Everyone can relate to these issues, and we all have, at one point in our lives, as I say, known someone close who has gone through this. We don't want to face these things, but we do need to get through them. We've got to make sure that we do what we do to get families through, help them in these difficult times and show the understanding and compassion they deserve.

After much careful consideration and amendments that have been debated, I believe that this bill has gone through a good deal of discussion in committee. It's great to see the support for the bill from a variety of different groups. If I have time, I'll read some letters into the record. The addition of chronic and episodic illnesses—it's probably in the majority of cases that we can think of many examples where this is a common issue with our families.

The bill demonstrates the opportunity and need for collaboration across party lines. Our PC caucus is glad to see that the government, the Liberal Party, is listening to the concerns we have as a party, and also the third party, represented under the former Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act.

My fellow colleagues enjoyed the opportunity to speak to that bill and, at that point, outlined a number of concerns our caucus had with the legislation. The original bill did not demonstrate proper consultation with stakeholders, or with the small business community, in particular. It failed to demonstrate that there was a real need for these changes to be implemented.

In Ontario, there are currently only two forms of leave available to workers who are protected under the Employment Standards Act: the family medical leave and the personal emergency leave. Under the current federal Employment Insurance Act, six weeks of employment insurance benefits may be paid to eligible employees under this leave.

The family medical leave is an unpaid job-protected leave of up to eight weeks within a 26-week period. In order to be eligible, a qualified health practitioner must issue a certificate stating that an individual who is to be cared for has a serious medical condition and has a significant risk of death occurring within a period of up to 26 weeks.

The personal emergency leave gives some employees the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid job-protected leave each year due to injuries, illness and certain other emergencies or urgent matters. This type of leave would only be eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

Bill 21 includes the introduction of new types of leave: the family caregiver leave for up to eight weeks, unpaid, per year; the critically ill child care leave for up to 37 weeks for parents caring for a critically ill child; and a crime-related death or disappearance leave of up to 104 weeks for employees whose child died as a result of this situation. The family caregiver leave mirrors the family medical leave in many ways; however, it does not include the provision of significant risk of death within that 26-week period.

It's important that this bill brings Ontario's legislation in line with federal legislation that was passed some time ago. I believe some of those concerns regarding the fairly restrictive time frames were addressed in committee to allow for more flexibility. As we have said before, all family members know of someone who has gone through a situation like this.

This bill also speaks to the compassion that members of this Legislature on all three sides have for people we represent. Honestly, I think there's not a person here who wouldn't agree with that kind of initiative or wouldn't agree with this plan. When a person has an ill child or family member, we all think of them. We can sympathize with the stress that they are under. Any child, we hope, is going to live a happy and healthy life, but that is not always the case. In these circumstances, it is important

for all of us to show that type of compassion and understanding when confronted with these types of situations. It's good to see that we are giving more respect for family members who unselfishly give of their time to care for that family member, and we are working to provide a level of support for them to do so. A streamlined piece of legislation is something that we can support.

With my riding of Sarnia–Lambton being largely rural with a small urban mix, I can certainly see this type of legislation would have a lot of support.

Additionally, when dealing with the loss or disappearance of a child, it's time that it finally is recognized. During this heartbreaking period of time for any parent who might end up in this situation, providing them time is not only compassionate, but it's just the right thing to do.

I shortened this speech up; it was a little longer.

We'd like to see this bill through. There are some important things in this legislation that actually eliminate inconsistencies between the federal labour code and provincial labour laws, and we'd like to see that changed instead of creating more inconsistencies.

Everyone's goal is the same. Many in this room, in this legislative chamber, have elderly family members at home, and we need flexibility ourselves to be able to keep them at home because that is where they want to be. They're at their happiest there and it's in our best interest if we can keep those loved ones in good health and in those types of situations they already lead.

This bill really comes down to fairness, because it's fairness for those families who have children or families or loved ones for that matter who may be ill. We need to be compassionate and realize that today.

The most important thing we should do in Ontario, and I think all members would agree with this, is to create that type of environment where there are jobs for young people and jobs for people who are in transition in those situations, who could be faced with these types of situations.

I know this bill has been debated a lot. We've dealt with many different situations. Many of our different ridings have these situations, but I think at the heart of them, they're all the same. It's about people going through these situations that are unforeseen and certainly tragic sometimes. We need to be able to do everything we can do to help people deal with those. I think most members would agree an initiative like this works well and it's not going to be harmful.

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I'm very pleased that we've had an opportunity to debate this bill as much as we have. I think it has given members an opportunity to bring up issues from their own ridings, and personal experiences as well. I think this bill has been vastly improved by the amendments that members from all three parties brought to the table at committee, the suggestions my fellow members have brought forward. The committee has certainly examined this piece of legislation, and we're able to be proud of

what we're accomplishing in this session of the Legislature.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC caucus support the bill. Compassion is not something unique to any one party here. I strongly believe that each of us in this room and in this chamber is in support of helping those in our society and within our community. There shouldn't be any doubt about it. It's all about how we go about doing it and implementing public policies to address those situations that we all face.

While we need to have a government in this province that is committed to managing costs and recognizing there are savings that can be realized, we also need a compassionate government and one that can work through issues of health care and providing those types of services. That's why I think at the end of the day we can come together as legislators and pass this bill.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to speak to this bill. I thank my colleagues for their consideration.

In closing, I would urge the government to consider moving forward on the issues that are really important to the people of Ontario, and that's creating winning conditions for the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his presentation this afternoon.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his thoughtful comments, and I want to add my voice again to this debate.

Earlier, my comments had talked about how one of the questions that we need to answer is: How are we going to address the fact that, as a growing demographic, elders and seniors are going to become more and more in need of care, that there will be a growing population of folks that may be ill, and that, as both a family unit and as a broader society, we need to answer the question of how we are going to care for those people as that demographic gets much larger?

The second component of my comments was the fact that not only do we need to be concerned about caring for those who are our loved ones or members of our family who are ill and critically ill; we also need to look at and have a serious discussion around what we can do to prevent the illness in the first place. That requires us to encourage prevention and health promotion.

The final component I want to wrap up my comments with is with respect to the actual way that this bill can be enforced. Without proper enforcement, any legislation is rendered meaningless. You can have the strongest piece of legislation with the most powerful protections in place, but if there's no enforcement of those protections, if there's no enforcement of that legislation, then it's rendered absolutely meaningless. So I implore the government to reconsider the Ministry of Labour's position and ability to actually enforce this legislation.

For too long, we've seen many labour-related laws and employment law matters that are simply not being

upheld to a level that provides the right type of protection to people in Ontario. So I think we need to really focus on enforcement if we want to make sure that this bill actually will benefit people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments? The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, thank you, Speaker. Every day this bill is stalled, we are preventing people from taking the time off to care for their loved ones. It's as simple as that. We've had 13 hours of debate during second reading. We've had eight hours of debate at third reading. At 21 hours, I am speaker number 75 on this issue, and you know what? We're all saying the same thing: Let's get this bill passed. Stop stalling and pass the bill.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Speaker. It's a great opportunity for me. I don't have any questions for the member, but I do have a few comments.

You know, the member has been here now for about seven years. I had the pleasure of being his seatmate for a period of time. I really think that the government should have engaged the member for Sarnia–Lambton when they tabled this bill with their strategy, because he is a success story in this Legislature. In his short period of time here, he has been able to get a couple of bills passed. I know that his Ontario One Call bill, which he co-sponsored with the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Mr. Miller, was passed; and also, the bill that I remember, being his seatmate—he had a number of petitions—which was a 25% tax credit for farmers that donated excess produce to local food banks. I think it's a great tribute to this member that he was able to get that added to the Local Food Act by the Premier, who is also the Minister of Agricultural and Food, using a friendly amendment. I think he has demonstrated over and over and over again, since he was first elected to this chamber, his ability to work with people. So I took his comments on Bill 21 to heart. I appreciated his efforts regarding this bill.

I know that the minister expressed a bit of frustration about it not being passed. Again, when we had the opportunity to clear the decks, her Premier didn't put that on the list of priorities. That was back in September. So I think there was ample opportunity for the government to work out a deal; I think now they're scrambling. I don't think they're managing the minority as best as they could.

I want to congratulate, again, the member for Sarnia–Lambton. I appreciate his comments. He's a great MPP, and I hope he'll be here for a long, long time.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to contribute to this debate again because it really is important. There are people out in the audience watching. The member from Davenport actually sent us a little email that he and his

new baby, Hope, are watching the Legislature. He's promoting education early, which I know that the member from Davenport certainly would be doing; that doesn't surprise me.

Here's a very good example: The member from the Davenport currently is watching us, and he's probably being informed on this bill on third reading, some of the amendments that we made, because he's not here right now to give a voice to this debate. So as he's listening, and many other people from London–Fanshawe, the constituents, are listening, it's important that we discuss this bill in third reading. Otherwise, why have a third reading? Why has the Legislative Assembly ever designed a third reading if we're not able to contribute to that process once it has gone to committee?

I mentioned this earlier, and it's kind of interesting because one of the things that we brought right into second reading debate was the fact that the time period was to be taken in blocks. If this bill was originally produced, and you talked to stakeholders, I would have thought that would be something that businesses would have brought right to the forefront of their concerns. When an employee is off work unexpectedly for the illness of a family member for a week or longer, that sometimes really disadvantages small businesses. So that was kind of a strange thing.

I was talking to my colleague there and saying, "Some of this stuff that we amended in committee: Gosh, that could have been done when the bill was presented, and maybe the process would have been a little quicker, and we could have been voting on this bill and passing it for those people who need it."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his reply.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to address the members who took the time to make such kind comments: the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the Minister of Health, my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, and the member from London–Fanshawe.

Thank you for those kind words to the member from Leeds–Grenville, as well. Yes, we did have some success on a number of private members' bills, and if the government would have chosen to include me in some of these things, I would work with them. I would certainly help them get their legislation passed.

As I was sitting here thinking about the remarks I would make, I wanted to give a shout-out to a local hospice in my riding: St. Joe's Hospice in Sarnia–Lambton. It certainly does a wonderful job. It's a place where a number of people have to go. They have hundreds of volunteers who work there; they do a lot of fundraising in the local community to keep the hospice going. That's how it's funded. Hundreds of people donate hours there as people come to the close of life. They spend hours there, and they do a wonderful job.

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I know there are a number of those institutions and types of facilities across the province. I want to give a shout-out to all those people who work there and the

volunteers who keep them working. It's certainly compassionate work. It's the kind of work that needs to be done. Unfortunately, people are faced with these types of situations. It's nice to know that there's a wonderful facility like this in my riding. I wish all of the ridings in Ontario had it. I know they didn't have facilities like that; I wish they did. I know from talking with some of my own members that they've had to go through situations like that as well.

Anyway, it has been a pleasure to rise and speak to this debate. I think the debate has been fulsome, and I think it has been worthwhile, because people have gotten a chance to stand up and talk about the issues in their own ridings and in their own personal lives. I think we can always learn something from that.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's always an honour to be able to rise in the House. It's one of the privileges of being a member of the Legislature to be able to rise in this House to speak. When a member wants to take that opportunity, I feel everybody should be able to have that.

Specific to today, I'm speaking on Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence. It's a very serious issue. I think I've heard from all sides that's an issue. Obviously, since this is at third reading, it's an issue that we are all planning to proceed with.

One of the reasons why it's important to fully debate an issue: It's also so that members themselves can fully understand the issue. As I was watching the debate today in my office—I had a few meetings, wrote some notes, did some research—I heard some really interesting comments, and I as a legislator learned.

So I hear many of the members across the way saying, "We have to move this bill." You know what? They have a point. I hope that in their caucus meetings before the government prorogued, they were making the same point on these bills, because that killed not only bills like this but many other bills. That's an issue.

I expect they did. I expect they had the same kinds of arguments. But obviously, moving forward bills like this—I heard one member say, "Well, if we did this today, we could help people today," and that's true. But if you hadn't prorogued, think of all the people we could have helped.

The decision was made to prorogue the government for many other reasons, including a leadership campaign, but several other reasons. Those reasons took precedence over the people who were going to be helped by this bill. So I am somewhat offended when members across the way say that I as a member or that my colleagues or the people in the official opposition—

Mr. Bill Walker: Colleagues.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, they're my colleagues—that we are wasting time. We're not wasting time.

Also, people watching at home—and there are people watching at home, both stakeholders and others—are also learning things, how things actually work here.

Something else as I was doing my research on this bill this afternoon, because I wasn't planning to speak today, but as I was listening to the people across the way, I believe the member from Guelph said, "We can't make any changes anymore, so why are we debating this?" The member from London–Fanshawe said, "That is the same with every bill in third reading," and obviously, it has been the custom of the Legislature to do this, and there's obviously a reason for it. The reason is so more people gain a full understanding of the bill: what it's going to do, what it's not going to do and how it could be improved in the future. The title of this law is the Employment Standards Act, 2000. I'm assuming that's when the act was first enacted. If lawmakers were perfect, we wouldn't have to be amending it now.

Even as we are debating this bill in third reading, we could be laying the groundwork, and people out there could be thinking, "This is one small step. What could the next step be?" Making laws isn't one size fits all and, "Let's get it done today." Being involved in this process is a continual process, and if it wasn't, then we wouldn't need to amend acts.

My colleague from London–Fanshawe brought up a few really good points, and some of them I'd like to add to. I remember that when this act was first brought forward, one of the issues was that to take leave, it had to be a week. You had to take a week-long leave. Quite frankly, that didn't make sense from day one. Who did they consult with on that? The idea that you would propose a week—I believe that when I spoke on second reading, like in the case of my mom—my mom needs someone for two hours, once a week. I'm sure there are lots of people like that. You could take an afternoon a week, as opposed to taking a week.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: A waste of taxpayer dollars.

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, I am being heckled by the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville that this is a waste of taxpayers' dollars. I'd like to get this on the record: Trying to get legislation correct and taking the time to do it in the venue where it's supposed to be done is a waste of taxpayers' dollars, but proroguing a government and spending a billion dollars on moving a gas plant for four or five seats is not a waste of taxpayer dollars. I don't like to be heckled on wasting taxpayers' dollars by the people across the way.

On another issue with this bill: There were some changes made for taking leave for people who have children with serious illnesses or people who have children who have disappeared, and that one really hit home for me because in my riding we had a young lady disappear probably a decade ago—Melanie Ethier. There are still transport trucks with Melanie's picture on it, and if you have information that could help find out what happened to Melanie—and this is another chance to do that. If anyone has information that they could bring forward to help the police find out what happened to Melanie, it's still an ongoing investigation.

This is a good amendment to give parents or family members of a disappeared child a year. But when your

child disappears, like for the Ethier family, it's a lot longer than a year. In our riding, especially in the Timiskaming Shores area, it was a life-changing experience for us all, because we come from a small town. Things like that shouldn't happen anywhere, but no one thinks of it happening in small-town northern Ontario. That has left a scar on our riding, but it has left a huge break in the Ethier family. If there's anything that we can do to further help them find out what happened to their child, it's time and money well spent.

As legislators, anything that we can do to help our constituents—we are making laws here; we're not playing games—

Mr. Bill Walker: Some of us are.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I don't think any of us work hard to get elected to play games. We work hard to get elected to make people's lives better. We're fortunate in this Legislature. I know most of my fellow legislators a

bit, and we all come from different backgrounds. We come from different places in the province, we come from radically different backgrounds, a lot of us, and that adds to this Legislature.

The fact that we all have the ability to speak on issues adds to the depth of our knowledge to make laws, both ones in the present and ones in the future. I'm very proud to have the ability to stand here and remind people about Melanie, remind people that this is an important issue, but also that it's important that the people they elect have the ability to speak on behalf of their riding.

Thank you, Speaker.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. 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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Mike Colle, Joe Dickson
Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
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Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Douglas C. Holyday, Mitzie Hunter
Monte McNaughton, Michael Prue
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
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Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Michael Harris
Peggy Sattler, Laurie Scott
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Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
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Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qaadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
John O'Toole, Jagmeet Singh
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Donna H. Cansfield, Dipika Damerla
Catherine Fife, John Fraser
Monte Kwinter, Jane McKenna
Rick Nicholls, Peter Tabuns
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
Paul Miller
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
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Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott
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Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
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