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des débats
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Thursday 23 October 2014

Jeudi 23 octobre 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 October 2014

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 octobre 2014

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FIGHTING FRAUD
AND REDUCING AUTOMOBILE
INSURANCE RATES ACT, 2014
LOI DE 2014 DE LUTTE CONTRE
LA FRAUDE ET DE RÉDUCTION
DES TAUX D'ASSURANCE-AUTOMOBILE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 22, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act to amend various statutes in the interest of reducing insurance fraud, enhancing tow and storage service and providing for other matters regarding vehicles and highways / Projet de loi 15, Loi visant à modifier diverses lois dans le but de réduire la fraude à l'assurance, d'améliorer les services de remorquage et d'entreposage et de traiter d'autres questions touchant aux véhicules et aux voies publiques.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When this item of business was last debated, the member from Scarborough–Agincourt had the floor with time remaining. I see we now look to another member for further debate. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Good morning. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 15 today, the legislation that addresses concerns that affect every driver in Ontario: unaffordably high insurance rates and the need to get to the root causes to provide relief across the board. Speaker, there is no doubt that auto insurance premiums in this province are unbearably high; the highest in the nation, in fact. We're number one, and that is certainly nothing to boast about.

I hear it from my constituents in Kitchener–Conestoga. Simply put, driving to work, picking up the kids or heading out on the weekend is costing more every day, and many are fed up with waiting for the promised insurance reduction that this government has guaranteed them countless times. "Where is the relief," I'm asked, "Where are those reductions?" Of course, the government set itself a 15% reduction target by August 2015, and to the surprise of no one, indications point to the fact that they're behind schedule. In fact, according to the

Insurance Bureau of Canada, the 15% reduction is absolutely not doable.

Even more concerning is the fact that the finance minister continues to lead us down the garden path while IBC's own policy people have indicated that the province's own regulator doesn't even believe the repeated promise can be fulfilled. In fact, it was revealed that "In our conversations with the superintendent of insurance, he's indicated to us that no one in FSCO believes that there's 15% that's in the system (to be reduced)." FSCO doesn't even think it is achievable, and we're hearing reports that the rates may, in fact, be heading in the other direction.

Only in Ontario could a government botch things so royally on such an important issue and continue to try to make motorists believe that their rates are, in fact, headed down. We realize what is behind this. We all recall the Liberal deal to adopt a 15% auto insurance reduction plan in a calculated move to gain support for the most recent budget—I guess two budgets ago. It is a good way to stay in office, but it's an unsustainable way to reduce auto insurance rates. That's why we, as the official opposition, put forward our own plan, a sustainable and effective plan to bring down premiums for everyone, a plan I look forward to elaborating on a little later.

We've known from the outset that the NDP's demand for a 15% auto insurance premium reduction would have unintended and negative consequences. Today, despite the fact that the government is well off its reduction target, we see the consequences, in fact, taking shape.

While we may not be seeing our rates going down much, we are seeing our insurance options reduced. We see State Farm citing the current Ontario auto insurance environment as a primary reason for their decision to head for the exits. This is a company that held 11% of the auto insurance market. Meantime, we are hearing more stories in our constituency offices and across the province of more drivers being dropped by carriers, as insurance companies scramble to find savings and rid their books of even the most moderate of risks.

Is this perhaps the kind of Ontario that we want, an Ontario where motorists are left without coverage and forced to pay exorbitant increased premiums from other carriers? We're heading in the wrong direction.

There's no doubt that we can't continue down this path, and we need to turn this around. All that said, it is important to note that by all accounts, industry, stakeholders and accident victim advocates alike consider the bill we see before us today as at least a step in the right

direction. But to be clear, without amendment, there are very few significant cost savings achieved by this bill.

The key, as we have heard and reported in this House time and again, is confronting the very real, expensive and debilitating issue of insurance fraud. We need to ensure that this is front and centre of any attempt to fix what clearly is a very broken system.

In recent days, the Insurance Bureau of Canada has made clear its focus and action steps on what has become a key driver of escalating rates. Over the last five years, from 2009 to 2014, IBC reports that companies have significantly increased their spending on fraud from 150% to 350%, with one company increasing its fraud spending by 780%.

That spending has been distributed over a number of areas. For instance, almost all companies—96% of them—increased special investigation unit staff, 71% introduced new claims intake procedures, 62% developed and implemented new adjusting procedures, 75% adopted new investigative procedures, and 78% restructured their special investigation units.

Meantime, insurers are now involved in forming the Canadian National Insurance Crime Services as an industry response, to pool and analyze claims data to identify organized or premeditated fraud. I believe that is a great step for insurance companies to come together to analyze those things. They in fact recognize the challenge and are dedicating resources to deal with it. But without the government's support, they are fighting a losing battle. A majority of companies still continue to experience increases in fraudulent claims as fraudsters grow ever more sophisticated.

Interruption.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry about that.

Mr. Michael Harris: Not a problem. Get the man a glass of water.

What are we talking about when we discuss insurance fraud? We're talking about situations that most don't even realize are as commonplace as they are—that is, until you become a victim yourself—staged collisions and rogue tow truck operators looking to bilk the system, while risking the safety of Ontario motorists. I'll give you a couple of scenarios, and I'm sure we've all heard the cautionary tales along these lines.

We have what's known as sloop and squat, where a sloop car suddenly speeds up and cuts off the squat car, usually driven by an innocent person—in the wrong place at the wrong time—who of course is unable to stop in time. Before the squat car can react, he rear-ends the sloop car and the insurance claim begins. That's just one example.

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There's also the drive-down, where the scammer appears to yield and waves to the innocent victim to proceed with a merge or lane change but, of course, as the victim merges, the perpetrator drives into the innocent driver, only later denying that they had, in fact, waved the victim on. You can see where this leads. I continue to warn motorists about that wave-through, as

you may be about to become the next victim. In fact, I have spoken to many constituents in my riding who have explained a recent accident. It is a perfect example of the drive-down.

Of course, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the oft-tried-and-true sideswipe, where the criminal collides with the side of the target vehicle, usually in a busy intersection with dual left-turn lanes. If the victim in the inner lane drifts even a little into the outer lane, the criminal intentionally causes a collision.

In cases of staged collisions, the big money starts flowing when the staged victims file claims for their injuries. While the collision may have occurred at a low speed, those involved claim for severe soft-tissue injuries that are difficult to disprove and can generate a flood of examinations and assessments.

Speaker, I haven't even mentioned the other side of these scams, involving unscrupulous tow truck drivers and body shops looking to make some quick bucks. We're talking about scenarios where a tow truck chaser being paid a referral fee by a vehicle repair shop quickly whisks your car away to their favourite dealer, which may or may not be the shop that your insurance company chooses to deal with. Before you know it, you're paying out of your own pocket for the tow and storage, and if you refuse to pay, then the repair shop can apply the Repair and Storage Liens Act and sell your vehicle to cover the fees. I can only imagine.

Now, we know that not all tow trucks are chasers and not all accidents are staged. We have insurance for a reason in this province. That's why it's important to get this right. To that end, I would like to note some of the details of the proposals we in the official opposition have brought forth to address the growing concerns. I would specifically like to thank my colleague Jeff Yurek from Elgin–Middlesex–London, who dedicated much time and effort in the last session in developing four pillars of the auto insurance action plan. I feel it's important that I repeat those:

(1) We want to encourage competition and reduce excess bureaucracy by adopting a file-and-use rate-setting process to allow companies to lower prices quicker, ensuring greater market competitiveness and encouraging a wider range of discount offerings for Ontario drivers.

(2) We've talked about reforming the dispute resolution process so that, in the event of a claims dispute, people could opt for private mediations in order to reduce wait times and costs associated with government-appointed mediators. We would also like to see the establishment of a true independent, peer-reviewed medical assessment system, a system that would standardize assessment procedures and require multiple assessments to be performed by medical professionals of the same specialization.

(3) This is the big one—we want to combat fraud. As fraud has such a debilitating effect on the insurance industry and associated rates, I think we can all understand the need to establish a special unit in the crown attorney's office to investigate and prosecute insurance fraud.

(4) Finally, we want to increase accountability by ensuring a fair, well-functioning marketplace for auto insurance by making senior insurer executives personally and financially liable for the conduct of the company.

That's where we're coming from in the official opposition. While some of this is reflected in the bill we see before us today, these are the areas we need to ensure are addressed as this bill moves forward through the committee process.

That being said, it's important to look at exactly what the government is proposing here in Bill 15. Of course, the bill proposes to reform the dispute resolution system by removing the jurisdiction from the Financial Services Commission and transferring it to a new body called the Licence Appeal Tribunal under the Minister of the Attorney General. As there is no mandate for the new dispute resolution system, we would like to see further details to be outlined before passage of the bill.

We have recommended having the option for a claimant and an insurer to use private mediators, as I mentioned earlier. This gives claimants more choice and allows them to avoid long queues in a publicly administered mediation process. Currently, there is a backlog of 16,000 cases, which increases costs on the system and prevents premiums from dropping. The bill must address the issue of why so many cases go to dispute in the first place. With lawyers on both sides taking issue with this part of the bill, this will be something that has to be addressed in committee.

Section 2 of the bill proposes to align prejudgment interest rates on damages to the market rather than the fixed 5%. Prior to 1989, we had a situation where the going interest rate was higher than 5%. Now that interest rates are lower than 5%, interest on non-pecuniary damages is grossly disproportionate to actual interest and can result in vast overpayment, potentially resulting in higher premiums as a ripple effect. I feel tying interest rates to the market will boost sustainability and in turn reduce premiums through a system that both insurers and customers can agree on.

Section 3 suggests issuing licences for health care providers that provide services to auto accident victims as a way to cut down on fraud. This was an issue addressed by the anti-fraud task force report back in November 2012. In the PC auto insurance action plan, we took their suggestions and called for better utilization of the Health Claims for Auto Insurance electronic billing system. We feel there is an opportunity to leverage what is already in place to provide oversight without additional bureaucracy. All health clinics should have a designated manager to bill insurers through the HCAI electronic billing system. With the ability to track activity, you can identify if there are abnormal billing practices due to fraudulent activity, and the individual health professional's licence will be on the line should they have improper billing or behave improperly. I think that's important.

Section 4 allows for greater clarity when issuing, renewing, revoking or suspending licences to insurance agents and adjusters, and we have no concerns with this section.

The final section reduces unreasonable storage costs for vehicles damaged in motor vehicle collisions which will help cut down on fraud and treat consumers more fairly when it comes to storage rates. As I had mentioned earlier, I had a bit of a fender-bender coming in on the QEW last winter, and it was only a matter of seconds before tow truck drivers all clamoured to the scene. I will say that a few of them were very generous in helping with traffic, to clear vehicles off to the side of the road, which was extremely safe, before the emergency responders arrived on the scene.

But as I had mentioned, there are some of these tow truck operators who are bringing your vehicle back to a shop of their liking, and it is extremely difficult to get your car out of the shop. We have obviously identified that there is an issue here for storage when their car has been taken by a tow truck company and the owner can have no knowledge of who actually has possession of their vehicle. It often takes hours or days just to locate where, in fact, your vehicle has gone. When you do, the rates for storage can be excessively high, especially if you are not opting to repair your vehicle at their shop. Of course, the current system requires the owner to be notified by 60 days. This is unfair and takes advantage of accident victims who could have been in the hospital unaware that there are costs accumulating. So again, reform in this area is something I think we can all support.

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Speaker, in conclusion, I have said that this, of course, is a step in the right direction for reducing auto insurance rates. It has certainly been a long journey for these reforms. I know that in each election, especially the last and the one before that, insurance rates were something that were talked about a lot. It was predominantly the major issue that allowed the government to perhaps survive in the 2013 budget—with the NDP's support, of course.

We've heard from stakeholders along the way, advocates for accident victims and, in fact, the towing industry, who do still have some concerns about this bill. I feel it's vital that we open our ears and listen to those concerns from those who deal with these issues each and every day on the front lines, and see where improvements can be made.

I want to make special mention of Kitchener-Waterloo and the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga. We have a very active insurance industry within the region. In fact, some of our largest employers within the region of Waterloo are insurance companies, and we can't forget our insurance brokers, who provide front-line support for those who, unfortunately, have to deal with accidents, whether it be home or auto. We want to thank them for everything they do in our communities, especially within the region of Waterloo. Some of our premier insurance companies employ thousands and thousands of people and are extremely great corporate citizens within the region, so I want to thank them.

In conclusion, as I had mentioned, there will be some amendments that need to be made before, I believe, we

are able to support this bill entirely. I look forward to seeing some of those issues addressed in committee. I do hope that they look back to the plan that, again, my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Jeff Yurek, put together, part of the PC action plan on combating insurance fraud especially, and incorporate those into the suggestions of the bill going forward so that we can move forward and tackle this ever-important issue that really stems from border to border throughout the province of Ontario. Thank you, Speaker, for the time today. I'll leave it at that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought the presentation made by the honourable member was actually fairly well done, in the sense that it spoke to the actual issues. For that, I commend him.

However, I think the spirit of what the government is trying to do in this legislation is to try to bring the 15% reduction to fruition. We understand that, but this bill, quite frankly, gives auto insurers far more than what they need. There is already enough money in the system, with all of the gifts that the government has given the insurance companies when it comes to previous changes to the act, that allow them to have savings of over \$2.5 billion—certainly, to God, they can find the 15% savings in this.

What we're doing with this bill, and where I depart from the honourable member's comments, is we're giving away things to insurance companies that at the end of the day are going to take away rights from accident victims: the ability to deal, for example, with the issue of interest on a settlement. Currently, if a settlement takes, let's say, six or seven years, you get 5% on your money. What ends up happening—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you. Somebody pointed out that there's no stay in my collar. Well, I'm going to stay around here just like that. How is that?

Anyway, the point is that the insurance companies currently have to pay 5% on the settlement if, let's say, the settlement is five or six or seven years down the road. That is being very, very much reduced by way of this legislation. That is a give to the insurance companies, but nonetheless, if a person had got their settlement at the beginning they would have got at least 5% and they would have put it into the market. What you end up doing is giving the insurance companies yet another break, rather than giving that break directly to the consumer.

There are a number of other points in this legislation that my colleague the member from Kenora–Rainy River will raise in debate. I just want to say that we are the ones who pushed for the 15% reduction in auto insurance rates to drivers. That is the goal, but this particular legislation is more a gift to the insurance companies than it is to the consumer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I am so delighted to hear that the official opposition agrees that Bill 15 goes a long way to addressing concerns that Ontario consumers have with regard to insurance.

The government, of course, is committed to keeping the auto insurance industry and system fair and affordable for the more than nine million drivers in Ontario. I can recall, from my years working in consumer advocacy, that fair and affordable automobile insurance was one of the main issues that was raised time and time again, and it was our pleasure to be able to work with the Insurance Bureau of Canada and brokers' associations to make the system more fair and equitable.

Bill 15 will continue to reduce claim costs and uncertainty in the auto insurance system, and it will facilitate further rate reductions. Bill 15, as I said in the House the other day, will also reduce fraud, which will impact on the reduction of rates.

We all know that fraud and abuse of the system increase claim costs and lead to higher rates for drivers. In fact, research conducted has estimated that auto insurance fraud cost Ontario consumers between \$770 million and \$1.6 billion in 2010. That needs to be stopped.

Bill 15 continues the government's work to combat auto insurance fraud. It's going to transform the auto insurance dispute resolution system. It's going to introduce provincial regulation of the vehicle towing industry. It's going to modernize insurance agent and adjuster disciplinary hearings. It's going to provide authority to address abusive vehicle storage issues identified by the task force. I know that these are issues that are important to my constituents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga for all of his research into this topic, which I think is of utmost importance to all of us.

I actually did my own research last year. I was doing some work for Rogers cable TV, and I had two representatives of the Insurance Bureau of Canada as guests. They laughed when I said to them that my riding of Thornhill has been told for years that we are the worst drivers in the province and that's why we have the highest insurance rates. I guess we all believed them, and we just took it. We had no choice. We had to pay the highest insurance rates.

It turned out that there was a huge ring of insurance fraud that was operating out of Vaughan, and 15 people were arrested last year. It was a very long investigation. It was exactly what the member from Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned. It's set up; it's cars that are in accidents every week. There doesn't seem to be a system to track these cars that are in accidents. They're put together with some foam and a bit of paint, and then they send them out on the road to stage another collision.

Why aren't we having some kind of registry of serial numbers of cars and following the cars that are in multiple collisions where other cars are found to be at fault? Why aren't we monitoring and checking up somehow on

the notes of doctors and physiotherapists who supposedly are giving treatments, unbeknownst to them? Anybody can go to a print shop now and print up very official-looking letterhead or prescription pads.

We have to do better. It's not enough to just say, "Let's arbitrarily cut insurance by 10%, 15%." Why don't we just cut it by 50% while we're at it? What we have to do is attack the things that are driving up the cost of insurance.

We don't just look at our budget for our family and say, "Let's just cut the food budget in half." We have to do it smart. What we're looking at now, thanks to the research from the member, are ways to cut it down.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate here this morning. We did debate the bill at length last night. I listened to my colleague, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, who has been a champion on this issue not only for constituents in his riding but certainly for drivers across the province. He very eloquently and effectively dissected what we see, as New Democrats, as glaring inadequacies in this bill. He pointed back and gave us a chronology.

Members of the House will remember that in 2010, the government initiated some pretty heavy changes to the insurance industry that resulted in a 50% reduction in statutory accident benefit costs and, in some cases, a 70% reduction in those costs to insurance companies.

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As a direct result of those changes, those insurance corporations in the province of Ontario benefited to the tune of \$2 billion a year in extra profit. Now, you would think that in our free market system, in our capitalistic type system, that if a company is making more money hand over fist, record profits, then some of those profits would be turned back to the consumer in the way of price reduction or cost reduction in a competitive marketplace. But that didn't happen. It boggles the mind. In fact, in many areas of the province, even with those changes, auto insurance rates have increased.

What we see in this bill is another gift, and we have a serious problem right in the title of the bill, Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates. It should be retitled "It's a great day to be an insurance company in the province of Ontario because you are going to make record profits," potentially. That's what we see as the effect of this bill. There is a high emphasis on fraud in this bill, and we definitely have to look at the root causes of fraud. Let's look at greed inherent in the insurance system and ensure that there is some fairness. It is your responsibility as regulators.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now refer back to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: I would like to thank those who chimed in for a couple of minutes in response to my 20 minutes on Bill 15, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act: the member from Timmins-James Bay, the new member from Newmarket-

Aurora, my colleague from Thornhill and, finally, my southwestern friend, down the road, from Essex. Thank you very much.

I think we hear fraud talked about a lot, clearly, each and every day when we think of automobile insurance. There are just too many stories out there that we've all heard about. Whether they're legitimate accidents or there is a fraudulent motive behind them, we have to get to the root of those problems.

Of course, Ontarians need auto insurance, and they expect that it's there for them when they need it the most for a variety of reasons. But I do think it's important to go back and talk about the aspects that my colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London and our party put forward last session to remind the government that they're important to perhaps adopt as they move forward. We've talked about encouraging competition, reducing excess bureaucracy by developing a file-and-use rate-setting process that will allow companies to lower prices quicker, really ensuring greater market competitiveness, and encouraging a wider range of discount offerings for Ontario drivers.

We've talked about reforming the dispute resolution process so that, in the event of a claims dispute, people could opt for private mediation in order to reduce wait times. Of course, combating fraud is one of the biggest aspects of it, because it has such a debilitating effect on insurance industry rates. I think we all understand the need to establish a special unit in the crown attorney's office to investigate and prosecute fraud.

I'll leave it at that, Speaker, and I look forward to the comments from the rest of my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member from Kenora-Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to say good morning to you as well as the members of this House and the folks who are watching from home. Today we're talking about a very important topic, and that is auto insurance rates, which is something that acutely affects the folks who live in my riding of Kenora-Rainy River.

I don't think there's any question that we need to make some significant reforms to auto insurance across the province. People are stretched to the max, and they can't afford the essentials. Many people are struggling just to find jobs and to stay afloat. Certainly, we see that in Kenora-Rainy River. Auto insurance rates are another cost that people are concerned about because the premiums keep escalating, and yet insurance is mandatory if people need to drive. In the north, of course, we have to drive. We don't have the luxury of public transportation. That's something I've talked about a fair bit since being elected.

The other point is that we've seen a fairly significant downturn in our economy in the northwest. That has put many people in the unenviable position of needing to travel for work. We're seeing a lot of people who are doing the regular commute to Alberta. To do that, of course, means that they have to pay for all the expenses

that go along with it, everything from a driver's licence, vehicle payments, maintenance, snow tires—which, of course, is a reality in the north—gasoline and what we're talking about today: auto insurance. It is no wonder that in 2013, 90% of the respondents to my annual budget survey said that lower auto insurance premiums are either a high or an extremely high priority for them in their everyday lives.

People are also struggling to understand why rates are so high. In 2010, which has already been mentioned this morning, this government made changes that benefited the auto insurance industry greatly, where premiums increased and accident benefits were slashed. In fact, benefits were essentially halved. I'll never forget the volume of people who came forward to the constituency office with their previous and current years' coverage details in hand, asking, "How can this be? How can it be that our benefits are essentially halved yet we are paying more? How could it possibly be allowed to happen?" I recall even then how people were struggling to stay afloat. The response from the government was, of course, that these changes would be in turn passed down to consumers and that they would see substantial savings.

In this House, when we've debated this bill previously, I also mentioned the fact that I was in, I guess you could say, possibly the wrong place at the wrong time and was involved in a head-on collision just outside my house on the Trans-Canada Highway. It was on or about August 26, 2010. I didn't really, at that time, know the significance of that, but when I went to seek some aftercare, going to see the chiropractor and these kinds of things, there was a lot of concern that my treating specialists were giving me, because they said that if I would have had my accident four days later, I wouldn't have been entitled to anywhere near the same benefits as just being hit those four days prior.

Again, with all those folks who have come into the office, we have seen that those changes have not been passed on to consumers. That argument, that by making some of those changes that those savings would be passed on to consumers, sounds a little like what we're talking about today. Here we are four years later, talking about making some significant changes, and we're told that if consumers kind of tighten their belts and kind of take their lumps, we'll see that translate into premiums. But I'm not so sure. I'm not so convinced, because we have heard this before and it hasn't translated into those savings. We never did see those other savings materialize.

Ontarians are expecting this government to lower auto insurance premiums as they promised in their 2013 budget. This was a big reason why I chose to support the 2013 budget, but this government has failed to deliver those changes as promised. Just bringing back a little bit of a reminder to folks: That's one of the big reasons why I decided that I couldn't support the 2014 budget, because in 2013, we carefully negotiated a very small list of things—about five things. Then we flash forward a year later and we didn't see any action on those five simple, very-easy-to-implement things. So I didn't have

any confidence at that point that this government would then be able to reasonably implement the 70-plus promises that were in this 2014 budget.

The fact is that costs need to go down, but the question is, are these proposed changes the answer? I think in order to really assess that, we need to look at some of the changes that this government seeks. I'm going to look at three particular changes.

The first is with respect to tow and storage services. My concern with this aspect is that it leaves so much up to regulation. I just wanted to reference the part of the explanatory note that I'm referring to. There are some changes that are being made to the Highway Traffic Act. It reads, "The Highway Traffic Act is amended in two main areas: the regulation of commercial motor vehicles and tow trucks and enforcement of the act generally by the addition of administrative penalties.

"In respect of commercial motor vehicles, the act is amended as follows"—I'm just going to read two points. The first is "to repeal the definition of 'commercial motor vehicle' in subsection 16(1) of the act and replace it with the authority to define the term by regulation." Then if you flip the page, point 5: "To prohibit drivers and other persons in charge of tow trucks from engaging in activities prescribed by regulation."

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Here we are, debating whether we are going to agree to something in principle, but we don't know the details. To me, that's concerning. Further to that, it goes on to talk about general enforcement and some of the penalties, which are not to exceed \$20,000. This is significant.

I don't think that this type of language and this type of approach bodes well for a government that has been anything but transparent. We've seen Ornge, we've seen eHealth, the gas plants, and now the Pan Am Games, and some of the secrecy around the privatization of our public assets like Hydro One, OPG and the LCBO.

I find it—and I'm sure many Ontarians find it—a little difficult to trust that this government will go into the backrooms to supplement the bill with regulations that will actually help the people of this province.

If anything, I believe that we need to keep a bright light shining on every nook and cranny of this government. Just approving something *carte blanche*, with a very rough skeletal frame, is not the way to go.

The second piece I wanted to review is dispute resolutions, especially the statutory accident benefits.

Ontario has a hybrid insurance system that accommodates both tort—which is negligence, pain and suffering—and no-fault claims, such as accident benefits, home care and income replacement, among others.

Some cases have both a tort and a no-fault component. Prohibiting the court system as an option for all disputes with a no-fault component means that a claimant with both a tort and a no-fault case will have to appear in court and in front of a tribunal separately. This change essentially removes the court option as an avenue of appeal on the no-fault side. This is confusing, and it's expensive for the victim, who will have to pay the added costs of

having a representative represent them when it comes to the two different levels. If anything, we should be wanting to streamline some of these changes and make it easier for accident victims to pursue their rights. This is, as I see it, very much a step backwards.

The third aspect that I wanted to look at in terms of this bill is prejudgment interest and some of the changes around that. Prejudgment interest is the amount of interest an insurance company needs to pay, based on the length of time it takes from the incident to the resolution. It is presently set at 5% of whatever the total is determined to be for pain and suffering. This amount can be significant for insurance companies, and it acts as a deterrent to dragging on a settlement.

Presently, a pain-and-suffering award of, say, \$50,000 that has been delayed by three years would result in an additional \$7,500 being paid in interest to the victim. Under these proposed changes, however, that same pain-and-suffering award of \$50,000 that has been delayed by three years would only be subject to a prejudgment interest rate of 1.3%. That would translate to about \$1,950, so it's going from 5% down to 1.3%.

I would say it's in everyone's best interest to resolve these things quickly but, really, for the victim of an accident, it's through no fault of their own that they find themselves in these situations. We need to make sure that we have timely compensation for them. It really doesn't encourage insurance companies to settle within a reasonable amount of time, and it's really not fair for accident victims.

In summary of some of the things that I've talked about, there's no doubt that we need to bring insurance premiums down in the province of Ontario. Not only do they need to be reduced, but I believe they need to be reduced in favour of the consumer. As mentioned, 90% of my constituents in Kenora–Rainy River have identified lower auto insurance premiums as a high or extremely high priority for them.

The other point that needs to be made is that auto insurance is a mandatory service. It's not a luxury add-on that drivers can opt in to purchase. I believe, consequently, that we have an obligation to provide this essential service in a manner that is as lean as possible with as little overhead and superfluous charges as possible.

The purpose of auto insurance should be to provide coverage if the worst happens, not line the pockets or pad the wallets of folks in the insurance industry. That's where I really have to take issue with the previous speaker, the member from the Conservative caucus, arguing that companies are leaving Ontario in droves. I think this legislation, as it is currently proposed, largely benefits the auto insurance industry. Is the auto insurance industry upset about the previously negotiated 15% reduction? I imagine they are. Are they doing all they can to bolster their profits? Sure. I would argue that that's the nature of business. But make no mistake: The industry is not poor. I would argue that those who are poor or struggling to get by are essentially the people of this province who are struggling already to make ends meet. They are the ones

who deserve our attention right now. They are simply asking for some balance to the system—balance—and I think that's fair.

In 2010, as I mentioned, there were substantial changes made on the part of this government to assist the auto insurance industry in reducing their costs, but despite changes to reduce costs, these savings have not been passed on to consumers. It has been reported that there was only one company that passed on these savings to their consumers. So when it comes to these changes, which are largely seen to benefit the auto insurance industry, people are understandably skeptical. Are these changes even going to result in any substantial savings for consumers?

However, it needs to be said that reducing auto insurance fraud is always an important target. It's something that we should be striving towards.

The problem with the proposed changes in this bill—*Interruption.*

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It seems that my House leader is very important this morning.

To continue on, the problem with the changes in this bill is that they aren't balanced or fair for consumers. Whether it is reducing the prejudgment interest rate or increasing legal representation costs by forcing victims to bring forward tort and no-fault claims separately through a court and tribunal and removing some of their appeal options, it's not positive for consumers. Some of these points, as I mentioned, are so vague that we don't know what the government plans to do with them, such as making unspecified changes to the commercial motor vehicle definition, imposing restrictions on CVOR certificates and some other things. I would argue that we are beyond the point of giving this government the benefit of the doubt when it comes to sketching out the details later on in the backroom.

The bottom line is that there are other ways to bring down auto insurance premiums by 15% across this province, and there are other places to squeeze. But paying for the reductions out of the pockets of accident victims is disgusting and it's wrong.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Food and Rural Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: They all go together. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I had the opportunity to listen to the speech this morning on Bill 15 by my colleague from Kenora–Rainy River. I'd just like to highlight a great insurance company in the riding of Peterborough, Topping Insurance. Karan and I have had our auto insurance with them for a considerable number of years—a great family-owned company that provides wonderful service to the community of Peterborough. I do know that Topping Insurance has been working hard to decrease the auto insurance for the great constituents of Peterborough by 15%.

It's always good to have a New Democrat talk about how our policy is very effective. I just got a note here: There was an NDP candidate in the wonderful riding of Burlington, Ontario—a great community. I'm sorry; he was the Halton candidate, not Burlington. I stand corrected. He said in a tweet, "Just got my latest car insurance payment update + I'm paying \$22 less a month!" That's an interesting observation by an NDP candidate from the wonderful riding of Halton.

Here's another one. Mr. Speaker, I think this photo op took place in your riding of Scarborough–Rouge River, with the leader of the third party.

Andrea Horwath: "Have you seen a big decrease in your auto insurance rates?"

Supporter nods yes off-camera.

Horwath: "You've seen any decreases lately?"

"Yes, and I've seen substantial decreases under the Liberal program of reducing auto insurance by 15%."

0950

I'm told that that photo op went by very, very quickly, and the leader of the third party shuffled quickly away from that situation.

Our plan is working—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I guess if you say it enough times you start to believe it.

I would like to point out that, as I said previously, a lot of people in Thornhill were surprised to find out that their insurance rates were so high because of insurance fraud, and not only the drivers. York region police officers seemed a bit taken aback by the news as well, that there was such a level of insurance fraud. In fact, one of the officers said to me that she was a bit chagrined, she was a bit embarrassed even, because she had so many times where she came to investigate collisions where drivers said, "He just slammed on his brakes in front of me for absolutely no reason," or "They waved to me to go ahead at the stop sign, and when I started to go, they drove into me; it looks like I'm at fault, but I really am not at fault," or "They were trying to push me off the road" or whatever.

The police officer just felt that these are people who don't want to be found at fault and don't want to be ticketed, and they're making up stories. What I'm suggesting, obviously, is now that things have been investigated, we're all aware that these aren't just stories. These aren't just people trying to defend themselves. Maybe we should be looking a little closer.

As I said before, I think it starts with the cars that are in these staged collisions. Why are we not looking at why some cars are in so many collisions? It doesn't matter who the driver is; they're smart enough to change drivers, because we do tend to follow the drivers around when there are accidents. But we're not looking at the actual cars that they're driving and seeing if this car has been in multiple accidents—changing ownership, changing plates, whatever it is they have to do to keep using

the cars for these staged collisions. I think that's where our investigation has to be.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River for her remarks about Bill 15.

We have been talking about this auto insurance issue for the three years that I have been here, and I've been listening to the members of the government say, "Well, you know what? You just need to go shop around. It's like going out and buying a new washing machine. You can get a good price if you actually go and shop around." But you know, I've done that. I have actually gone online to try to shop around, and I can tell you, there isn't very much difference in prices between any of the companies that are offering auto insurance, which is mandatory here in the province.

The Liberal government promised to reduce auto insurance rates by 15%. Their target was 8% for August of this year. They haven't got there. I can tell you, in my community and many communities across this province, people have not seen a reduction in their auto insurance. Now, the Minister of Agriculture talked about somebody saying they had a \$22 reduction, but on what premium? If they had a \$22 reduction on a \$2,200 premium for the year, that's 1%, Speaker.

The issue of accident victims and the issue of actually taking away that 5% penalty will have huge negative impacts on victims. I can tell you, my next-door neighbours were in an accident about six years ago. It was six years before they actually got a settlement on that case, people who are 85 years old. Their health benefits and housekeeping benefits were all cut off after two years. They're paying out of their own pockets to keep going in their house while they're waiting for these things to actually solidify and get a payment. I think that we really need to make sure, if we're bringing forward bills, that they're actually going to benefit the victims.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm absolutely delighted once again to stand on behalf of the government's bill. There's a whole new spirit of co-operation, I'm sensing, in this House since the election, this being the second bill I've had a chance to speak to.

The member from Kenora–Rainy River had some interesting ideas that she wants to bring forward at the committee, and we look forward to hearing them. But what I continue to hear is widespread support for the general direction of the bill, from the member from Thornhill as well.

We are getting at fraud. We all recognize that fraud is an important part of why insurance premiums are higher than they should be. Every one of us has experienced a situation, I'm sure, where someone they know or they have personally been involved in a situation where there was fraud in the system.

In my own life, I was in a car with my mother, driving on the 401 in a snowstorm. We were going about 50

kilometres an hour. There was no speed violations involved; we were driving with the conditions. A car took us out. Another car came from behind and clipped the back of our vehicle.

I stood with this woman on the side of the road for over an hour and a half, waiting for tow trucks to clear out the mess. She had no problems—nothing. She wasn't injured. And I was surprised: A year and a half later, we get a frivolous lawsuit coming down, making my mother, at 86 years of age—whipping her into a frenzy for some woman who had found a lawyer who was going to go forward and go after the insurance company to see what she could get.

The cost of litigation is so high that insurance companies are recognizing that sometimes it's better just to settle. It's unfortunate that now people realize that just by putting in an application, they'll get a settlement. That is increasing the cost of writing insurance.

It's not about consumer protection measures. It's really about rooting out the fraud so that we keep the settlements down and keep our premiums down.

The notion of prejudgment interest is not meant to be a stick to force insurance companies to settle. It's meant to compensate people for the reasonable cost associated with the length of time so that if legitimate claims come forward, they will be legitimately compensated for the cost of living during that period.

Thank you for supporting this bill. The co-operation is appreciated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Now I go to the member for Kenora–Rainy River. You have two minutes for your response.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs as well as the members from Thornhill, Welland and Beaches–East York for their comments.

I don't know that I would go as far as saying you have my widespread support or that there is necessarily widespread support in this chamber. I think there is a general agreement in this House that we do need to look at fraud, but we also need to look at a bunch of other things. We need to look at making the system more fair for everyone who is involved.

I don't believe that cutting costs for the industry is the way to achieve balance in the system. I believe very much that we've been there, and we've done that. We've seen those efforts on the part of this government in 2010, and we've seen how those haven't translated into savings.

With regard to the member from Beaches–East York's comments about how the prejudgment interest isn't intended to be a stick to be used against the insurance companies, that it's meant to compensate people for their legitimately lost income if this had been settled faster, I would argue that it's already an un-level playing field. Right? Insurance companies have very, very deep pockets. They have all sorts of lawyers on staff. That's what they do. This is like a big part of their business. I think there needs to be some kind of an incentive to wrap this stuff up quickly. Having seen first-hand some of these

accident victims who have struggled with going long periods of time without being paid, I would just say that we have to do that.

I look forward to this going to committee to examine this issue fully and to broaden the range of some of the options that we pursue in terms of restoring balance to this system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Two summers ago, I had the interesting task, after finishing the consideration of the government's first budget in its minority government, of then taking the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on a bit of a cross-province tour to listen to people talk about auto insurance. One of the interesting parts wasn't so much who came as who didn't. Who didn't come were any of the insurance companies.

While we learned an awful lot about how to skew the system in favour of one party or another, one of the parties who seemed to be very satisfied with the status quo was the actual insurance companies. I thought it was unforgivable then, and I consider it to be unforgivable today.

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Some of the things we found out, at the time, that the province has been trying to incorporate into legislation are worth bringing back and mentioning here. The province would probably have been a lot further along in incorporating some of these badly needed changes into legislation had the Conservatives and the New Democrats not stalled and filibustered and, for that matter, provoked an election this spring—although I have no trouble with the outcome, Speaker. I really do think that the people of Ontario, when they had a chance to pronounce judgment on the performance of the government, on all of its files, including this insurance file, said, “We like the direction that you're going. For heaven's sake, keep it up.”

Let's talk a little about some of the things that we found out, which the province has been trying to fix, and that we need all-party consent to get fixed. For example, Speaker, one of the problems we face right now is that it's very possible to take a car that has been junked and get it back on the road. One of the ways is, you simply don't fix it. You just wire the thing together and a car that's still mechanically unsound can often be back on the road within a day or two. That's wrong. It's those types of cars that are driving our insurance premiums up.

One of the other things is that when you bring in your car, your insurance company is going to say, “I'm going to approve fixing your car, but you're not going to be able to use parts from the original equipment manufacturer. You've got to use off-brand parts,” or “You've got to use reconditioned parts.” That's going to put a car back on the road that's very likely to have a mechanical failure not that far along. That's wrong. As a province, we have to address that issue. If it is a car going back on the road after having been fixed, particularly after a motor vehicle accident, it has to go on the road with proper parts. It can't go on the road with parts that are made by a less-

than-reputable manufacturer and that are likely to fail again. We need the help of both opposition parties to get measures like that passed.

Some of the other problems: some of the bogus accident insurance claims. I remember hosting one of the larger insurance underwriters in my office. They were talking about this, and I cut them short and said, "As the insurance industry, how many of these bogus clinics have you guys shut down this year?" After a long pause, it was, "Well, er, um, actually, none." Let's give them some credit. A year later when they came back to see me, I said, "How many of these clinics have you shut down?" and they actually had a narrative to show the litigation that they had begun against some of the bogus accident and physio clinics. I thought, now they've got some credibility; now we're seeing what the industry is doing.

This is a two-way street. This is not just the government saying, "We've got to fix this." We, the province of Ontario, don't have public auto insurance. We feel this need is best served by the private sector, and so far, I'm still okay with that. I don't think that the taxpayer needs to replicate an entire insurance industry and spend several billion dollars on setting it up before we write the first insurance premium. I still think that's not the right way to go. I still think the private sector can do a better job.

However, if you really want to see a nice system of executive salaries and bonuses, have a look at the ones in the insurance companies. They do very well, thank you.

We've been after the insurance companies to put some teeth into their actions and to go after the bad actors, to go after the body shops that do shoddy work, to go after the phony accident claims, not just to pay them off. Paying them off means that they take the cost of fraud, they mark it up and they pass it directly on to you. That's not acceptable. That's part of what our Ministry of Finance has been working with the auto insurance industry to get down. We can no longer have them shrug their shoulders and accept fraud as a cost of doing business, mark it up, add on a profit component and pass it along to you in the form of higher premiums. That's not acceptable at all. We need the assistance of both the Conservatives and the New Democrats to get strong, assertive measures passed to make sure that stops happening.

Let's go on with some of the things that continue to happen, things I found out in our deliberations two years ago and things I still get visits from some of the participants in the industry to talk about: tow truck drivers who will haul a car to a repair facility—in this House—that's paying them off. It's not acceptable. We need some real teeth in legislation that deals with the towing industry. There are a lot of good people in the towing industry. I remember having a neighbour who was a tow truck driver, and he told me what practices he felt were objectionable within that industry.

So we cannot have tow truck drivers deciding that they're going to become part of it and just say, "Why don't I get mine, too?" As a tow truck driver, you're there to provide a service, and that's to take a vehicle that is broken down or been in an accident to the repair

facility of the driver's choice, and to bring it to a repair facility that is going to look after that car and that driver at their choice, not yours.

The other thing: I had a visitor to my office, a lawyer, and he said, "Here's one of the things that we're finding. A lot of ads that you see on radio and on television and a lot of the billboards and print ads talk about auto accident insurance injury claims. Well, who do you think is paying for all of those ads? You are. You're paying for them in the form of higher insurance premiums."

How about the practice that this lawyer alleged happens, in which the law firm has an honorarium if you're going to refer—perhaps as a hospital admitting nurse or a surgeon—a case to them to handle? Now, who do you think is paying for that? You are, in the form of higher insurance premiums. We need the help of the New Democrats and the Conservatives to get to the bottom of that and to make sure that that doesn't happen, because that can take money off of your insurance policy.

Distracted driving is something that the police have talked to me about. Here's something that I didn't know: To the insurance companies, a distracted driving conviction can affect your insurance rates almost as much, if not as much, as a driving-while-impaired conviction. So I actually have to just sort of break my train of thought to say to everybody in Ontario: Take the cellphone and either put on a Bluetooth headset, or if you have a car with Bluetooth, learn how to use it, but don't operate the thing with your hands.

I have listened to police officers say that they're trying to be sensible in this because it's now an expensive fine and it's now three demerit points; they're reluctant to take somebody and say, "All right, this is going to cost you a lot of money. It's going to put three demerit points on your record, and when your insurance company discovers that this is what you've been fined for, you're going to get whacked with a much higher insurance premium." That's one that's completely, absolutely preventable. I have to ask people in Ontario, if you have to have your cellphone with you in the car—put the thing in, charge it up—that's great, but we shouldn't be using them in the car. That includes when you're stopped at a traffic light. That includes the time that you're stopped at a traffic light. Don't use the thing in the car. It is going to cost you money.

Another of the things that we need the help of the opposition for, to pass legislation with teeth to get out of the system and to address, would be getting the vehicle insurance numbers of junk cars reinstated—putting reconditioned but properly junked cars back on the road. There's a whole host of ways that you can do this, and we need the co-operation of the opposition to pass legislation with teeth to make sure that this doesn't happen anymore.

Another way that they play games is to have a minor collision, one that's easily repairable. The insurance company will just write off the car. That's the opposite problem. First, there's the problem of taking a car that shouldn't be on the road—and discovering that within days it's back on the road; another that hits you in the

form of higher premiums would be taking a car that is easily repairable and writing off a car that should be repaired and put back on the road, which is, again, a much larger cost to the insurance company, which is marked up and passed along to you in the form of higher premiums—absolutely, positively wrong and indefensible.

While the province claims the rates are down by 3% or so—the numbers from FSCO—all of us in our constituency offices, of course, have had people who have come in and said, “Well, actually, my insurance premiums are higher.” I can understand that, because during July, August and September, I had to pay my home insurance, higher; my other half’s car insurance, the same; and my car insurance, the same. That’s now the Travelers insurance company; it used to be the Dominion of Canada.

1010

I called up my insurance company and said, “Where’s my discount? I should actually have a discount. I haven’t moved. I haven’t moved, and I haven’t been in an accident.”

Hon. Jeff Leal: Bob, bully them to death. Bully them.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Exactly. Don’t heckle me, because you’re on my side.

I said, “So how does it come to pass, if insurance premiums should be going down, that my insurance premiums have not gone down?”

I discovered that what they do is they just change the classification for the postal code in which you live. They reclassify the postal code in which you live, and they say, “Well, your classification is up, but your rates are down, so the net effect to you is the same.” Oh, come on.

Applause.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I think I’m touching a responsive chord here.

While the province can do a lot of things in the way of legislative changes—and I’m going to come back to my theme—we need the help of our colleagues. In this, we’re all on the same side. We’re all on the side of the person who pays those auto insurance premiums. That’s the person whose interests all three parties here have to keep paramount.

We’ve got to keep these bills moving through committee. We’ve got to get them passed, we’ve got to get them enacted, and we’ve got to put some teeth into them. We’ve got to make sure, when that legislation is enacted, that the insurance companies actually obey the law and bring our premiums down, and that they don’t recapture them in the form of higher executive compensation and other assorted little games that they play.

Let me come back to the bill. Some of the rate changes for individual drivers, however, do vary, and let’s talk about some of the factors that determine what premium you may pay.

Your driving record does matter. Sometimes people have come to us and they’ve said, “My premiums went up.” It turns out, as you’ve explored it with some extra questioning, that in fact their driving record changed. In other words, they had some convictions. If you’ve got a record of convictions, you can expect your insurance policy premiums to rise.

It’s worth shopping around at the time that your premiums are up. It’s worth actually finding an insurance company that is going to give you accident forgiveness on the first incident. That means that the first time you’re in an accident—which can happen. You can have a spotless record for years or decades, and you end up in a fender-bender if you hit a patch of ice or a patch of wet road. That doesn’t make you a bad driver.

We need the insurance companies to be able to take into account the fact that good drivers—people with impeccable records for many years or many decades—can hit a patch of ice, can hit a wet road, can hit something that will cause a minor fender-bender. It shouldn’t send your policy premiums through the roof. Our measures with regard to insurance have to make sure that insurance companies have a reasonableness test when it comes to adjusting premiums.

Your premiums vary with the type of car that you drive, so it’s reasonable to assume that if you get a new car, there’s likely to be a premium change. If you are upgrading the value of your car, you’re likely to see a higher premium. If you’re going from driving a top-end car to a more economical car, you’re also likely to see a decrease in your premiums, and that’s where it also pays to shop around.

It does depend on where you live, and this is something that I disagree with. I don’t think it should depend on where you personally live. If there’s a statistically higher incidence of fraud in the area where you live or the postal code where you live, that shouldn’t penalize a good driver. I have never, ever accepted that argument, and I never will.

I remember having a discussion with one of the insurance brokers out in Streetsville, where we were talking about that. I said, “I had a public meeting the other day. There were about 50 people at it, and what they were saying to me at the meeting was that if you’re a new Canadian and you live in Brampton, you can’t find an insurance carrier that’s willing to insure you.”

He laughed and said, “Bob, it’s not if you’re a new Canadian. They don’t want to insure anybody in Brampton.” I said, “Why?” He said, “It’s because of the incidence of fraud.”

I said, “So how should that penalize someone who lives in Brampton, who has driven responsibly and obeyed the law and has a spotless record? Owing to where they live, they can’t find an insurance carrier to insure them?”

Speaker, I think have you a message for us.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I’d like to introduce a number of guests I have here today. We have Sandra Gib-

bons. Judy Legg is here. We have George Habib, president and CEO of the Ontario Lung Association. Andrea Stevens Lavigne, Chris Yaccato, John Chenery and Carole Madeley are all from the lung association.

We also have Noah Farber, who was here earlier and has left, from the Asthma Society of Canada, as we debate Ryan's Law this afternoon.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It is my pleasure to introduce in the east members' gallery today Debbie Bolter, who is a constituent of mine in Peterborough, and at a silent auction, bid on lunch with an MPP. We certainly welcome her to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce former MPP Rob Milligan from Northumberland-Quinte West. He's bringing his school here to Queen's Park today, if they're not already in the gallery, and I'd like to welcome him back to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of my colleague from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, it's my pleasure to recognize today's page captain, Lily-Anne Villemare. Her mother, Judy Wilcox, will be in the members' gallery this morning. I hope members join me in greeting them.

Mr. John Vanthof: On behalf of my colleague, the MPP for Bramalea-Gore-Malton, I'd like to introduce today's page captain, Jagmeet Mangat, and his mother, Kulbir Singh, and his brother Ranbir Mangat. They'll be in the members' gallery. Welcome.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to introduce constituents of mine who are here for lunch with me today and great supporters: Phil LeBruyne and Susan Robillard.

NATHAN CIRILLO

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

We are all deeply saddened by the tragic loss yesterday of Corporal Nathan Cirillo of Hamilton's Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders regiment, who was one of my constituents. We are grateful for the brave men and women, like Corporal Cirillo, who give their lives in service to our country, something we share in common with all Ontarians.

I am requesting unanimous consent to have a book of condolence placed in the main lobby of the Legislative Building so that we and other Ontarians can pay our respects to this brave young father.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek is seeking unanimous consent to put a book of condolence in the main lobby. Do we agree? Agreed.

I thank the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

SHOOTINGS IN OTTAWA

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'd like to start today's question period, as a member of provincial Parliament from the nation's capital, by giving our condolences as an assembly to the Canadian Forces soldier who was killed yesterday guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a memorial in itself.

I'd like to thank our federal parliamentarians for showing the great unity that we had in our nation yesterday, and the Ottawa Police forces, our RCMP and the guards at Parliament Hill, our sacred seat of democracy.

There are several of us here from the nation's capital and we are reminded that we are, in Ottawa, the guardians of every Canadian's second hometown. Yesterday was quite a disturbing day. But despite our political colours here and where we came from in the rest of the province, our colleagues stood united here.

I would especially like to say thank you to the Premier and the two leaders of the official opposition for showing great unity yesterday for our colleagues. Your genuine kindness and concern for us with family and friends and constituents in the nation's capital meant more to us than you will ever know.

To the staff of the Legislative Assembly who carried on, to the guards here and to our Sergeant-at-Arms and our Speaker, I want to say thank you to you as well. It was a tremendous show of respect.

A lot of us wanted to be at home yesterday. We couldn't be. But if there was a place that we could be, it was right here with 106 other people who wanted to stand up for democracy and the values that we cherish, like freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and even freedom of the press.

Ladies and gentlemen, with that in mind, I would like us today to join with our federal colleagues and start our day by singing O Canada. I seek unanimous consent for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean-Carleton is seeking unanimous consent to sing O Canada. Do we agree? Please rise.

Singing of O Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is for the Premier and is regarding the security situation here in our province.

Premier, the tragic events yesterday morning in Ottawa shook our country. In the second brutal and violent act this week, we have seen another of Canada's finest brutally murdered and we have seen our enemy strike out at the heart of our democracy and of our freedom.

Last night, my family, like many others across the province, gave thanks to the ceremonial guard at the

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and all it stands for, and we gave thanks to the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Commons as well.

Premier, can you please update our assembly on the efforts you are undertaking to work with all levels of government to ensure the safety and security of Ontario residents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to reinforce what has already been said and to assure the House that the most important priority for our government and for all the members here is the safety and security of all Ontarians.

We send our thoughts and prayers to the family of the Canadian Forces reservist from Hamilton who lost his life yesterday, and to all of the people who were injured and their friends and families.

I also want to thank the members on all sides of the House for their unity yesterday in coming together.

To the question of what is being done at this point, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services has reached out to his counterpart, Minister Steven Blaney, to the chief of Ottawa police, Charles Bordeleau, and to Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson to offer assistance. We want Ontarians to know that our police and our paramedics and firefighters are trained and are prepared for any eventuality.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Premier. We all hugged our children a little tighter and a little longer last night as we were reminded of the daily risks undertaken by those who serve and by those who wear Her Majesty's uniform.

We also know, as Prime Minister Harper said, that Canada will never be intimidated and that attacks like this will do nothing but strengthen our resolve to redouble our efforts.

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Here at Queen's Park, we're thankful for the help and assistance of the Legislative Security Service; our own Sergeant-at-Arms, Dennis Clark; the Ontario Provincial Police and, of course, the Toronto Police Service.

Premier, can you please let us know if you are considering changes to strengthen security here at Queen's Park as a result of the terrorism we witnessed yesterday in our nation's capital?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Before I speak about the precinct here, I just want to also add that CSIS and the RCMP are sharing information with the OPP and with local police forces, and our local forces are working together. One of the most important things that the minister and I spoke about with the RCMP and the OPP yesterday was the co-ordination of efforts. That is ongoing, and it is important that every member in this House know that local police forces are also part of that network.

In terms of Queen's Park, I want to take this opportunity to thank our security, both within Queen's Park and throughout the whole precinct. Their professionalism and dedication is second to none, and we're very, very,

very grateful. I have every confidence in the abilities of the Legislative Security Service, and I certainly will leave it to the security services to make decisions about what provisions need to be made here at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will offer a little clarity that the Premier is correct: It's the responsibility of the Speaker, as selected by the members, to take care of the security within the Legislature. We are consistently and ongoingly working with the Sergeant-at-Arms and the senior staff to ensure the safety and security of not just the members but all the people in this building, and we will keep you updated.

Supplementary, please.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and back to the Premier. There can be no doubt that yesterday's attack was a direct strike at our democracy and at our freedom. As Canadians, we reject these tactics as cowardly. We pledge to remember and hold dear the life of Corporal Nathan Cirillo, and we pledge to never be intimidated.

Of course, Canada is not immune from these types of attacks, from these types of tactics and from all this type of terror. Yesterday we saw our Premier, the opposition, the Speaker and all members come together and work together for the good of the people and for the good of our communities.

Premier, how do you plan to continue to work with all members to ensure the safety and security of the towns and communities that we represent all across Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I expect and I propose that we continue to work in the non-partisan way that we have over the last 24 hours. The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services has briefed cabinet and members of all three parties on the framework that we have in place to address threats of violence and what we know about the incident.

The minister continues to receive updates on a regular basis. He gets those updates from authorities. He will continue to work across the aisle to provide updates as they become available. I would just say to members opposite that if you have any questions, if there is anything that you are unsure about, please do not hesitate to speak with the minister because we will provide information as we can. But we also want you to know that if you have any questions, or if there are questions from your communities, please let us know about those so that we can share all the information that we have.

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My next question is to the Premier. Yesterday and of course in the days and weeks ahead, our resolve as Canadians to never be intimidated will continually be tested as we seek to balance the need for order and security within our traditions of freedom and open democracy. We all have a renewed appreciation today for the vitality and stability of our country. It is important that we safeguard both the well-being and quality of life of the people of Ontario, and that is why I

want to speak to you today in this question about the economy.

Economic security is about fostering opportunity and opening trade barriers that are preventing growth and prosperity from taking hold. Ultimately, it's about creating jobs and growing our local economy in our communities.

Premier, the people of Ontario want to know, what are you doing today to tear down trade barriers, create jobs and ensure Ontario's economic security?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, the member opposite will be happy to know that I am leaving for China on a trade mission with the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Economic Development. That is all about finding ways to work in partnership, to look for opportunities and to connect businesses here in Ontario with opportunities in China. That is a major part of our economic strategy.

The member opposite will also be pleased to know, I think, that in my conversations with my colleague Premiers across the country, we are very intent on removing barriers. I am going to be speaking with Premier Couillard today and tomorrow in Niagara at the Chamber of Commerce economic summit. We are engaged right now in a conversation about how we can provide more openness between Ontario and Quebec and among provinces across the country. That is an active conversation among Premiers in this country.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Premier, you speak about travelling with the delegation to China to meet with friends and partners in Jiangsu province. You're also going to stop, I understand, in Beijing and Shanghai to talk about how we can increase that relationship.

While I can appreciate your desire for these types of trips, the people of Ontario have far greater concerns right here at home. While you are focused on expensive international missions, provincial Premiers all across Canada are moving forward on a Canada-wide free trade zone, something that we discussed in this House back in July.

Premier, have you made any real progress on this front since we last spoke, or are you still refusing to work with Premier Brad Wall to get it done?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's quite a remarkable question, given that I was fully a part of the conversation with the Council of the Federation. All of the Premiers across the country agree that this is an issue that we are engaged in. We are looking at the agreement on internal trade and we are making changes. We are updating it.

There is a little bit of an undercurrent in the member opposite's question that somehow we haven't done anything. That echoes what some members of the federal government have said, Mr. Speaker. It's just not true. We are engaged, as Premiers, on making sure that we open up and solve the real problems and the real barriers to trade where they exist. We are not going after phantom barriers. We want it to be a very real process. That's the exercise we're engaged in. Where there is a real barrier,

where there's a real opportunity for improved trade, we are making those changes.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: While you are focused on your trip to China, within Canada there are significant trade barriers in numerous sectors, including energy, labour and procurement. These barriers are costing Ontario residents directly, with reduced opportunities, fewer jobs and higher consumer prices, and are something we simply cannot afford.

Premier, interprovincial trade makes up a huge percentage of Ontario's economy and, because of that, the people of Ontario are counting on you to take the lead on important opportunities for our workers and employers.

In the spirit of working together, what specific actions will you commit to today to move forward with Ontario's participation in the job-creating Canada-wide free trade zone?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm taking those actions. The member opposite is at least three months behind, because I am already working with my colleague Premiers to make sure that we find the opportunities to work together. I went to Quebec. I met with Premier Couillard. We talked about opportunities even before we went to the Council of the Federation meeting. We are working on breaking down those barriers.

I just want to take on the question about going to China.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Simcoe North, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If the party opposite is going to propose that we, as a government, never travel internationally, that we never take the opportunity to go to other countries and create new markets, then I would say they are wrong-headed, they are not looking at the opportunities that exist for Ontario, and I reject that notion.

We must connect with other countries. We must turn our chairs outwards and we must become an exporting nation to other countries around the world.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pretty good time for a junket.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North: second time. Thank you.

New question.

LEGISLATIVE PRECINCT SECURITY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday was a difficult day for Canadians. Over the coming weeks and months, we will all be looking for answers. This isn't a time for partisanship. As Canadians, as Ontarians and as parliamentarians, we are part of a big family. I think we owe it to all Ontarians to make sure that their House, the House we are in now, is safe and open.

Does the Premier agree that we need to be thoughtful and balanced in the coming days and ensure we keep our proud tradition of openness and access to our Legislature alive?

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with that imperative. I think it's extremely open. This is the people's House, and it's very important that we keep access to this House as open as possible.

At the same time, I have to make sure—we all have to make sure—that we abide by the advice from the Speaker and security authorities here in the precinct and beyond. The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is working with all levels of security authorities to make sure we have all the information that's necessary, which we will share, as I said, with members of the opposition parties.

We will do everything in our power to make sure that this is a safe place and a functioning place for the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: As an MPP, I am proud to walk the halls of Queen's Park and see everyone from locals to visitors from across the globe visiting our Legislature. Of course, we need the legislative precinct to be safe. I believe that people from every corner of our province should feel welcome to come to our Legislature, whether it's to see question period, visit their MPP or see the beautiful art on the walls. This place belongs to Ontarians.

Does the Premier commit to supporting that tradition, that this Legislature belongs to Ontarians and that we need to ensure they feel safe and welcome at all times?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for the question.

First of all, I want to pay my condolences and respect to the family and friends of Corporal Nathan Cirillo. The tragic incident that took place yesterday in Ottawa was in the heart of my community, the community of Ottawa Centre, which I have the great privilege of representing.

I have a lot of friends, and my own staff, who were engaged in the incident and lockdown at Parliament Hill. I want to thank all the members for their support yesterday and today. It made my job that much easier in terms of making sure we all are safe in our province.

Speaker, as you are well aware, matters around safety and security at Queen's Park are totally within the purview of yourself, as the Speaker of this Legislature, and that of the Sergeant-at-Arms. We, of course, salute and thank the professionalism and dedication of all the security staff who work at Queen's Park. We will leave it up to you and the security experts you rely on to make a determination as to the level of security at Queen's Park.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, I think we all agree that this is a time for coming together. I want to take a mo-

ment, on behalf of our caucus, to thank our Sergeant-at-Arms and our team of professional Legislative Assembly security.

Does the Premier agree that our security protocols will need to be guided by facts and ensure we proceed rationally and calmly?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, thanks to the member for the question.

When it comes to the safety and security of the precinct at the Legislature, as I mentioned earlier, that is totally within your purview as the elected Speaker of this House. Of course, you, working with the Sergeant-at-Arms, will make those determinations, relying on expert opinion.

I want to assure the members of the House that, as the Premier mentioned earlier, we have very well-coordinated plans, working with the federal government. CSIS, the RCMP, the OPP and our local police services regularly exchange and share information so that we have effective plans in place.

Yesterday, as the incident developed, we saw all those plans being fully and properly activated, making sure that information was provided through the federal government to the OPP and through the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to all local police services so they know exactly the steps they need to take.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, in estimates with the transportation minister, we learned, unfortunately, that promises that were made by the Liberal government during the campaign are not actually promises at all regarding transportation to Ontario communities but simply possibilities. Apparently, the dedicated transit funding that we also heard promises about means a multi-billion dollar transit loophole. We were promised dedicated transit funding, but there's nothing dedicated about it, because there's no legislation and there's no regulation.

If "dedicated revenue" doesn't actually mean that anything is dedicated, how does the Premier define "dedicated transit funding?"

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I hope folks will understand that I'm a little bit under the weather this morning, so my voice doesn't sound as it normally does.

I think it's unfortunate that the member who is asking us this question today wasn't paying close enough attention to the really wonderful discussion that we had at estimates yesterday.

As I've said many times, both yesterday at committee and in this Legislature, we have an ambitious plan to move forward with investing \$29 billion over the next decade in crucial public transit and transportation infrastructure.

Just yesterday, in fact, the Minister of Finance responded to a question in this House by making it very

clear that the funding that needs to be in place for us to deliver these positive results for the people of Ontario is in place by virtue of not only our campaign commitments but the passage of the budget earlier this year.

Speaker, I would ask the member opposite to work with us. I know the people of her community want to see these positive results, and we will make them happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Sadly, I was paying attention, and I heard that the Niagara rail project may not happen, that Scarborough is just a pipe dream, that Hamilton may not happen. That's what I heard.

This government likes to claim that they're dedicated to transit, Mr. Speaker, but of course the fact is that transit revenue isn't dedicated at all. So how can the Premier actually expect anyone to take their dedication to transit seriously?

It's a direct question: Will the Premier promise Ontarians today and show her commitment to transit by bringing in legislation and regulations that ensure that dedicated transit funding actually goes into transit?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm really happy to have the chance to answer this question. It's unfortunate that the member who is posing the question is choosing to hear, I suspect, what she wants to hear around this.

I think the people of her community, the people of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and the people of Ontario want us to get past these kinds of games—the semantics; this notion of parsing words—and they actually want to see us deliver results.

She asked yesterday at committee whether or not we can trust what we're doing as a government and what we propose to do. What I said to that member at committee, which I will repeat here today, is that what I have trust in is the people of Ontario. On June 12, they gave this Premier and this government the mandate to invest \$29 billion over the next 10 years. I trust them. They've entrusted us, and we're going to get the job done.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: What the people of Ontario heard was the Liberals promising dedicated transit funding and that the promised Trillium Trust would hold that money. That's what they heard. But there is absolutely no guarantee that even a nickel will make it into the Trillium Trust.

I ask again: Will the Premier promise Ontarians today, and show her commitment to transit, by bringing in legislation and regulations that ensure dedicated transit funding actually goes into transit?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of introducing a budget not once, but twice. I gave the opportunity for the members opposite to appreciate what it is we're doing.

We are putting forward—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: In the book, and following discussions that we've had since, even with the public who went forward and read this book—probably more so than the opposition, by all counts—we talk about establishing a Trillium Trust, which would be the funnel to put forward all the funds and revenues and excesses that we do from those assets, to be put in that trust. As well, we've dedicated certain portions of our gas tax to transit.

Mr. Speaker, what is important to note is that we are building transit. The Minister of Transportation and this government are making the necessary investments, and we're funding it through the Trillium Trust and other means.

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RONDEAU PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Minister, I'm sure you've been updated on the ongoing dilemma of the Rondeau Cottagers Association.

Fact: 283 cottager leases expire December 31, 2017. Fact: The park was established in 1894 for the purpose of cottaging. Fact: Three environmental reports that were completed in 2013 were only publicly published during the writ period in May of this year. This government, Minister, has displayed a clear pattern of holding documents and releasing them when they will face the least amount of scrutiny. Lastly, the heritage dock damaged during the harsh winter was disassembled without an engineering report to determine the extent of the damage. Locals feel that this could, in fact, be a sign of things to come and are worried about the park's future.

Minister, will you tell us today why these docs were stalled and who gave permission to tear down that dock?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you to the member for the question. I know that the issues around Rondeau, in the broadest context, are very important to him. In fact, I think maybe the first question I had in the House after I'd been appointed as the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry was from that member.

I would say to him that it's very similar in some contexts to the question that was asked yesterday by his colleague around Algonquin Park. Both Rondeau and Algonquin are multi-use parks. They have a long history of being multi-use parks. We respect that. We're trying to find our way and migrate our way through these issues.

In the supplementary, I'll provide a bit more detail for the member on where we are when it comes to Rondeau specifically. But I will say that at this point, there is no decision imminent. We have respected the history of multi-use for Rondeau and for Algonquin. We had a great chat yesterday with the member about how we've approached the issues related to Algonquin. Hopefully, in the supplementary, I can provide the member with a bit of comfort as we move forward on the Rondeau situation as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Minister, the longer your department delays the RCA report, the more people worry that the 283 cottages will, in fact, be removed. Former Ministers Cansfield, Jeffrey and Gravelle have stated that the cottagers have a right to remain in Rondeau. Minister Oraziotti had stated that this pressing issue would be cleared up on his watch, but in fairness, an election got in the way. Minister, your predecessors don't want this, the cottagers don't want this, and I sure as heck don't want this. The decision will have to be made under your watch.

So Minister, will you agree to meet with me by October 30 to finalize a positive outcome for the Rondeau cottagers so they can continue to live in peace and harmony with nature, restore their cottages and once again stimulate the economy?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you once again to the member for the question. I'm happy to meet with the member, but I won't put a timeline on the decision, so if that's the point of the meeting, we'll say no. But if you want to meet and have a discussion around issues related to Rondeau, I'm happy to do that.

As the member knows, there were at least two studies that were conducted related to Rondeau, both economic and environmental. Those studies were brought in-house. They were reviewed. The issues related to Rondeau are considered so important to the government that they not only took in those studies, but then they also asked for a peer review of those studies. We're still analyzing that data. I haven't had the ministry come back to me with information related to the peer review of those two studies. When I get that, I'm happy to share it with the House. At some point going forward, we'll make a decision, and we'll let the member know.

But again, in regard to the meeting, we're happy to sit down. In fact, we live in the same building now. I saw you in the elevator the other day. Maybe we don't even have to use legislative time. Offer to buy me a beer. We'll get together, and we'll talk about Rondeau. It'll all be—

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

ELLIOT LAKE INQUIRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you.

My question is to the Premier. Justice Bélanger took great care, two years and \$20 million to consider the full picture of what went wrong that day in June 2012 that led to the Elliot Lake mall collapse. Justice Bélanger made numerous recommendations for this government to implement so that this tragedy would never happen again. Lives were forever changed by those events, and I agree with Justice Bélanger when he says, "The residents of Ontario, and Elliot Lake in particular, have a right to know the extent to which governments and other public institutions will implement the recommendations and the reasons for any deferral or rejection."

Premier, what are you doing to implement Justice Bélanger's recommendations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will want to comment on this, but I want to take this opportunity—I haven't had a chance to do this in the House—to thank Commissioner Bélanger and his team for the very thorough study of the Algo Centre Mall tragedy. My heart goes out to the families and the loved ones of Mrs. Doloris Perizzolo and Ms. Lucie Aylwin. It's a very tragic, tragic situation, and we are committed to making sure that events like this won't happen in the future. I say that sincerely to the member opposite.

What we are doing in the immediate term while we're reviewing the report, because we are committed to reviewing the report and looking at next steps—but in the meantime, we're establishing an advisory panel to get recommendations on how to move forward. We're strengthening and clarifying the process of ongoing rescue and recovery efforts, and we're reviewing the guidelines that can help first responders to work together. So that's in the immediate term.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Some of the recommendations from Justice Bélanger's report include:

- implement minimum structural maintenance standards for large-scale buildings across Ontario and require them to be regularly inspected;
- create a publicly accessible database of structural inspections performed by licensed structural engineers;
- restore funding to urban search and rescue teams, enhance their training and ensure they can be quickly dispatched to all parts of the province;
- build partnerships with Ontario Mine Rescue, which has 875 trained volunteer rescuers who are all mine employees, to assist in future disasters.

Minister, when can we expect actions on these recommendations? The memory of Lucie and Doloris is more than enough motivation to getting it right this time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thank you for the question. Of course, the events at Elliot Lake were a real tragedy, one that no member of this Legislative Assembly would ever want to see repeated.

The commissioner did a very extensive and very fair report and made a number of recommendations, all of which we are taking seriously. The Premier mentioned, in her response to the first part of the question, setting up the advisory committee. We're doing that.

I want to remind the member opposite also that the commissioner acknowledged in his report, very eloquently, I thought, that the current system we have in Ontario works very, very well, that it's a model that many other jurisdictions look to for advice and guidance. I think that speaks well for most of our building officials.

We, of course, are going to conduct a comprehensive review. The advisory committee is being set up, as the Premier mentioned.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. In my riding of Etobicoke Centre, we have a large number of small and large business owners, as well as people who are involved in business. When I speak with them, they tell me that it's so important that here in Ontario we create an environment where businesses have an opportunity to grow, and through that, we create employment for all Ontarians across all sectors.

One of the most effective ways to do that is through the expansion and strengthening of our trade relationship with the United States. In fact, I know that the Premier's mandate letter to your ministry emphasizes the government's goal to advance international trade interests.

Minister, would you tell us what action is being taken to ensure a beneficial trading relationship with the United States?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Etobicoke Centre for asking.

Speaker, last week, I was in America. I was in Washington conducting a trade mission. This was my first trade mission as minister responsible for international trade, and I am proud of it. I had a great trip, very fruitful and downright important. It is important because, as the member states, the US is Ontario's largest trading partner.

In 2013, Ontario's exports to the US totalled \$120 billion, importing \$115 billion. In Ontario's trade with the world, the US represents 64% of that total. This is a big number. We must maintain our close ties with the US. We must strengthen our trade with them. It's a win-win situation. It will benefit our economy. It will create jobs. It will benefit the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm sure that the people of Ontario will be pleased to hear of the confidence the minister has in our broader relationship with the United States. It's encouraging to know that this government understands and values the broader scope and depth of our partnership.

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I would say, however, and I think the minister would agree, that it's critical that we explore all possible avenues for economic development and growth. In fact, I was recently at a meeting at the Rotary Club of Etobicoke, where I met with business people who are giving back to their community, and they spoke to me of the work they are doing abroad, in Asia and in Europe, through their businesses.

The economic success of Ontario will be greatly influenced by our ability to expand, negotiate and work with our global trade partners. Minister, the business community of my riding—and, I believe, of all of Ontario—would be interested in hearing what steps are being taken to provide additional opportunities for trade investment outside of the United States.

Hon. Michael Chan: Speaker, while I was in Washington, I was told that the US has more trade discussions

with Mexico than with Canada. When I asked, "How is this possible? How does Mexico work with you so often?" the response was, "Because they keep knocking on our doors."

Our trade partnership with the US is one that we must work to preserve and strengthen. The Premier's mandate letter was clear when she said that we must seek opportunities worldwide. It is our duty to knock on these doors on behalf of all Ontarians.

As the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, I will work to knock on the door of the United States and the doors of the world. This is why I look forward to trade missions like the one to China that myself, the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development will embark on this week.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. There is a plan by the government to eliminate 140,000 child care spaces in the province of Ontario. The Association of Day Care Providers said just yesterday that your Liberal plan "would not only do little to prevent illegal daycare centres from operating, it could push many licensed child care centres into closing"

This will amplify the child care shortages across the province of Ontario, particularly in suburban and rural communities like the ones I represent. I would caution the government against this plan that they've got in place, which is being debated this afternoon.

I would ask the Premier if she will pull her plan to eliminate 140,000 child care spaces across the province and instead consult with child care operators right across the province.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes. I'm not sure, but I would understand, with all the things that happened yesterday, that perhaps the member opposite missed this: The Ombudsman actually released his report yesterday, investigating the ministry's capacity to deal with unlicensed daycare and how we followed up on complaints.

I would like to say that, in fact, the Ombudsman of this province has made a number of recommendations—113 recommendations—and actually noted in his report that Bill 10, the legislation that we began leadoff on yesterday and are debating this afternoon, addresses 35 of the recommendations. He exhorted us to get on with dealing with it quickly and passing it quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's pretty simple: She's only meeting a third of his recommendations. Above and beyond that, this is the big challenge, and something that the minister probably doesn't want out there today, but this is what the Ombudsman actually said: It's about a government that put kids at risk through "years of bad administration and neglect." That's from him. That means that the ministry has failed.

He used words like "the ministry neglected," "lack of communication" and "careless and inconsistent com-

plaint intake practices” to describe your ministry. Now, because of the government’s malfeasance, 140,000 child care spaces are at risk in this province.

The Liberal plan that is before this assembly will do nothing to fix the problem. If the government is not going to pull the bill—which is a bad bill, and which child care operators across the province are saying is a bad bill—will the minister at least commit today to travelling to affected communities right across this province, in suburban and rural Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I will commit to doing exactly what the Ombudsman recommended, which was to pass the bill as quickly as possible. That’s what I will commit to.

I suggest that the member opposite actually might want to read what the Ombudsman said a little bit more closely, because he pointed out that we have already addressed 95 of his recommendations; that there are another 60 that we have addressed by doing things like creating a dedicated enforcement unit to look at unlicensed daycare complaints; and that we have put in place a searchable website so parents can get the information about unlicensed home providers.

What I would finally—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Get your facts straight, Liz.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’m going to ask the member from Simcoe North to come to order, but I’m going to use what he said as a springboard to my recommendation that I’ve always used. Please use people’s titles and their ridings only. It lowers the temperature, and I don’t want it raised.

Please finish; wrap up.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I would like to read to you the Ombudsman’s concluding remark:

“In the past year, the ministry has made genuine and focused efforts to rise to the challenge of ensuring that Ontario has a proactive, timely, risk-based, and effective system for monitoring unlicensed child care operations.” That’s what the Ombudsman said.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mr. Joe Cimino: My question is for the Minister of Health. This evening I will be attending the fifth annual Sam Bruno Dinner to raise funds to bring a PET scanner to our hospital, Health Sciences North. I knew Sam personally; he was a businessman who spent his final years working to bring this crucial diagnostic device to the north. Our community has carried on Sam’s fight to ensure northerners have equitable access to life-saving technology, and together we raised almost \$500,000.

I would love to deliver good news tonight to Sudbury. Will the new minister commit to finally purchasing a PET scanner for northeastern Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you for the question. I want to say that I had the privilege of meeting with the North East LHIN just a couple of weeks ago when the cabinet was in Sudbury for that meeting, and I was able to speak with the health leadership in that community, in

fact in that region, to get a better understanding of not just the needs going forward but also the incredible services that are being provided in Sudbury and elsewhere.

With regard to this specific issue and request, I’m happy to talk to the member opposite more to familiarize myself with precisely what the request entails and where my ministry is at in terms of consideration of that request, as well. I’m happy to address the issue more in the supplementary as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Cimino: For over five years, New Democrats have been standing up for northerners in making a simple, straightforward request. We want northerners to have the same access to life-saving PET scanners as every other Ontarian. That’s what is fair and that’s what is right. Why does the government continue to ignore the needs of northeastern Ontario by refusing to purchase a PET scanner for our community?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you again for the supplementary. I have to say that the services that are being provided, as the member opposite knows, not only in Sudbury but in the region as a whole, are state-of-the-art and something that the north, and in fact the whole province, can be proud of with regard to the investments, but also the tremendous gathering of health care professionals who have been able to provide services that I am confident are as important to the locality but as exceptional as we find in other parts of the province. Again, as I mentioned to the member opposite, I’d be happy to speak more directly with him about the specific request that he mentions, so perhaps we could make those arrangements.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Chris Ballard: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last year, we experienced one of the toughest winters in recent memory. As the member for Newmarket–Aurora, I and my aching back distinctly remember the challenges that my community faced while contending with the harsh weather—snow, ice and cold temperatures day after day, it seems. That’s why I was extremely pleased to hear the Minister of Transportation announce last Thursday additional oversight and equipment for winter maintenance. This is a strong step toward being prepared for the upcoming winter season, and I know that many in my community of Newmarket–Aurora were pleased to hear about this great initiative.

Could the minister please provide members of the House with further information on last week’s announcement?

1120

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by trying to recover my voice, and thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for that very timely question. I also want to thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West and my parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, for all of their work in the announcements

that we made last week regarding MTO's preparations for the upcoming winter season.

The member from Newmarket is certainly correct. Last year was a difficult winter for people living right across Ontario. That's why we announced last Thursday that the government of Ontario will be delivering 50 additional pieces of winter maintenance equipment to southern Ontario. This equipment will help ensure that freeway ramps and shoulders are cleared more quickly, which will help to make our roads even safer for those commuting this harsh winter. That number of 50 is in addition to the 55 new pieces of equipment that were deployed last year, primarily in northern Ontario.

We're also introducing 20 new inspectors who will provide on-the-ground oversight of our contractors during winter storms.

I'm confident this will help us be prepared for this coming winter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I want to thank the minister for his response.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to attend the opening of the 13-kilometre extension of Highway 404 from Green Lane to Ravenshoe in East Gwillimbury in September. I was pleased to drive that highway with the member from York-Simcoe, and many others. I don't think that was the member who passed me in that little black Volkswagen; that was another regional member.

This great new extension is taking 22,000 cars off the local roads each day. Many of those cars would pass through my riding, so we're very appreciative of that extension.

I'm pleased to know that our government is committed to keeping the highest possible standards for winter maintenance on roads like these. But, Minister, last winter there were a number of concerns raised by people living in Newmarket-Aurora—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Chris Ballard: —that equipment was not getting onto our roads fast enough. The faster the snow is cleared, the safer our roads will be for Ontario drivers. I want to make sure that my constituents will be provided a safe commute when travelling in the winter.

Can the minister—

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

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I very clearly got the gist of the member's question and I want to thank him for the wonderful leadership that he is showing in Newmarket-Aurora, as a neighbour to all of us who also have the privilege of representing York region communities.

Speaker, I know that there were concerns raised last winter regarding the snow not being cleared quickly enough. We have clearly listened to this feedback, and we're working to take proactive measures, some of which I mentioned in my initial answer, for the upcoming winter season.

There is no doubt that every additional piece of equipment that we have on the roads, the highways, the ramps

and the shoulders makes a positive difference. Additional equipment allows our contractor partners to deploy support quickly to where it's needed most, and it ensures that they are able to work with us to clear our highways, our ramps and our shoulders as quickly as possible. This is because the safety of our roads is our number one priority. We will continue to work with all of our road safety partners, all communities across Ontario and our area maintenance contractors to make sure that our province is adequately prepared for what could be, but we hope won't be, another long and cold winter.

ASTHMA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Last session I worked very hard to try to get my private member's bill, Ryan's Law, passed through committee before the election. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. In July, I reintroduced my bill, and it's coming up for second reading this afternoon.

Premier, Ryan's Law is very important. It would ensure that the one in five children who are asthmatic can attend asthma-friendly schools regardless of where they live in our province. It is my hope that we can put aside our partisanship and work together to ensure that this vital bill is enacted into law as quickly as possible. However, I know that with a majority government, opposition bills tend to get shelved, regardless of how vital they are.

Premier, will you commit to doing everything you can to ensure the quick passage of Ryan's Law?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member opposite for his question, because we agree that the health and safety of our students is one of our absolutely top priorities. I do want to say that our heart goes out to Ryan Gibbons's family for his tragic loss, and to thank you for your advocacy on behalf of children with asthma.

I'd also like to thank you because I know that last time, before we had the election, your bill not only passed second reading, but it got to committee; there were a number of amendments that were made. I want to thank you for when you retabled the bill; you've actually captured a number of the amendments that had already been agreed to in committee.

I'm particularly happy to see that the language that actually makes it clear that where a child's parents and doctors consent to the child carrying the inhaler, that they can do that. Yes, we are—

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you for the answer, Minister.

Back to the Premier: Premier, I have heard from many families across this province whose children are still not able to access inhalers. I'm positive, after the last response, that Ryan's Law will pass through second reading.

Premier, I would hope going forward, though, that the bill does not get lost in the committee structure and the House leaders can work together to ensure that Ryan's

Law goes out to committee as quickly as possible. I'd like to see this bill passed into law by spring so that next September all children with asthma throughout our society are able to have safe environments in the school.

Premier, would you ensure that Ryan's Law gets priority as it moves through committee so that we can get it through third reading and into law by spring?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Obviously, I have no control over conversations between the three House leaders. But what I did want to note is that we are supportive of the bill. I do have one area of concern, which is that we are seeing bills come up that are specific to a number of different diseases and the feedback that we are getting from educators is that it's very difficult when they have a separate law addressing each health problem that a student might present.

We've asked OPHEA, the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, to have a look at the issue and to report back to us on best practice because we really do need—I commend you for the great work that you've done with asthma, but we really do need to find some comprehensive way of pulling together responses to all the different diseases.

I'm also looking forward to the report OPHEA will be presenting in the winter.

CHILD CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I was a working mom and like every other parent I cared nothing more than about the safety of my child. So it makes absolutely no sense to me or any other parent that this government could repeatedly fail to look out for the safety of kids in unlicensed daycares. Yesterday, the Ombudsman condemned the Liberals' oversight of the unlicensed care as abysmal, inept, dysfunctional, careless, sloppy and wrong.

Why did four children have to die in just seven months of daycare before this government realized it wasn't doing a good job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: What I would like to note is that while the Ombudsman quite accurately described some of the problems, what he also noted was that we have, not even waiting for the legislation to be passed, taken a number of steps already to implement some of his recommendations. That includes things like setting up a dedicated enforcement unit. One of the remarks that the Ombudsman made was that the people who were responsible were mainly responsible for licensing, not trained investigators. We actually have hired the people doing the training to have a dedicated enforcement unit.

Now, when we pass Bill 10, they will be able to be much more effective, but we've got that dedicated enforcement unit to respond to complaints in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Once again, I'm going back to the Premier. I asked the Ombudsman to conduct his investigation after the tragic death of two-year-old Eva

Ravikovich in a dirty, overcrowded, illegal daycare. The government ignored complaints about this daycare until it was too late. Then the government claimed in court that it does not owe a duty of care to 800,000 kids in unlicensed daycares. I think every parent in this province profoundly disagrees.

In light of this scathing report, I'd like to give the Premier another chance to do the right thing. Does the Premier believe her government owes a duty of care to 800,000 kids in unlicensed child care or not?

1130

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I said before, the Ombudsman himself has pointed out that we have already addressed 95 of his 113 recommendations. That includes legislation, Bill 10, which, now that we've set up the enforcement unit, would actually give them some teeth. If we can get Bill 10 passed, those inspectors would have the power to enter without warrant; the ministry would have the power to have administrative penalties, which in plain English means fines; we would no longer have to go to court. In fact, when somebody violates the rules, we would be able to impose fines of up to \$100,000. So for the first time ever, if we can pass Bill 10, we will have the ability to do something about the complaints.

So I really hope that the member opposite, who is very passionate about child care, is actually going to help us get the bill passed.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, the home construction industry is a crucial part of Ontario's economy. Thankfully, it is thriving and employs tens of thousands of men and women in good jobs.

In my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, tens of thousands of homes are under construction every day, from high-rises to home rebuilds and renovations. But tragically, this summer, a 19-year-old worker from Scarborough by the name of Ryan Pearce lost his life on one of these home construction sites on Brookdale Avenue in my riding while he was working on underpinning a home.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, my constituents and people all over Toronto want to know what our government is doing to ensure the safety of construction workers so that more don't die on the job, especially on these home rebuild projects. How can we prevent further tragedies like the one that befell Ryan Pearce?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the honourable member for that excellent and important question. I know my thoughts are with the family and with the colleagues of the person who lost his life in that tragic incident this summer. I know the thoughts of all members of this House are with them as well.

I think we all agree that when Ontarians go to work, they are entitled to come home safely at the end of the day, so workplace safety is the priority of the Ministry of Labour. It's a goal we work to at the ministry each and every day. We're working hard to ensure that both the employees and the employers in this province know their

rights and that they are fulfilling their responsibilities. We're actively prosecuting employers that choose to break the law. We're proactively inspecting workplaces; we're ensuring that those rules are being followed. We're working with partners in prevention of future incidents.

But we know more needs to be done, particularly in construction, to ensure the safety of everyone who works on these sites. That is why the Premier, in her recent public mandate letter, underlined increased health and safety as a priority of this government. We are working right now on an action plan. I can address that in the supplementary, perhaps.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Hopefully, this construction safety action plan will help prevent future tragedies like the one that befell this poor 19-year-old kid who was working on his first job. He had just graduated from high school in Scarborough, first in his class. He gets the job. He's working underpinning—no training. We don't know what kind of supervision there was. No 19-year-old should have to lose their life on their first job.

When I met with Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer, George Gritzotis, I was very impressed with his knowledge and his willingness to act.

Mr. Minister, what I worry about is not the large-scale construction projects but the tens of thousands of home renovations and rebuilds which are taking place all over this province. What do we have to do to ensure the homeowner, the contractors, the workers and the provincial and city inspectors have the resources to train, inspect and ensure that worker safety is taken seriously? How can we make sure everyone involved takes safety seriously, understands that rebuilding and renovating a home—

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

Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The member is absolutely right. We need to pay as much attention to the smaller projects as we do to the larger projects in this province.

That's why the construction action plan is going to be developed with system partners from big and small business. We're going to build upon the work that's already under way that better protects workers in our construction sites already. We're working with those partners to develop new mandatory entry-level training that is unique to the construction industry. We're also introducing new mandatory fall-protection training.

We've got joint health-and-safety-specific training standards that we'll be introducing for those committees. We're moving forward with some regulatory proposals that are going to enhance both the health and the safety of construction workers specifically, because it's this simple: We need to put an end to deadly workplace fatalities. With these safety mechanisms in place on construction sites all over the province, we think we can make a difference in reducing injuries.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In the Brock township area

of my riding, the Brock Community Health Centre has been left in a holding pattern by the Ministry of Health as it awaits final approval for its permanent location. The paperwork has been filed. The project has been fully endorsed by the Central East LHIN. The money has been put aside, and the community has waited patiently for many, many years for this project to be completed.

Minister, I ask you today why final approval of stage 2 of this capital investment project has not been received.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. In fact, first I want to thank the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock for her advocacy and support for the development, on a new site, of the Brock Community Health Centre. I know that she has been a strong supporter of this project, and I thank her for that.

Certainly, this is a process. Often, for the proponents, it seems unnecessarily long. There are actually measures in place to ensure that steps are followed and the decision is made on a good, scientific basis and also from an operational perspective, to ensure that the CHC is able to continue, in an appropriate way to respond to the needs of the community.

Issues such as space, volume and, obviously, the number of patients that will be seen, and staffing, are important to that consideration in making that decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: As I said, the board of the CHC, the Brock CHC itself, the employees and the community have anticipated that this project would be done in a reasonable time period.

Programs have been located at five interim locations. Three of them have had to be moved from those locations due to health and safety issues. Because of the limitations of those locations, they cannot hire a full complement of resources that have been approved by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and they can't recruit doctors, most importantly of all.

This announcement was initially done in 2006, I believe. The funding for the permanent facility was done in 2011 and so we're talking 13, 14 years, and we seem to be mired down.

Yes, I appreciate what the minister has said on the steps, but when you have all the parties that I've mentioned, everyone that is involved, saying that we've waited a very, very long time and we've given you everything that we have and is necessarily required from the ministry, we'd just appreciate final approval as soon as possible, Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm actually optimistic that we can, in a relatively short period of time, move beyond the stage 2 process. I know that the Central East LHIN has been working very closely with the Brock CHC.

I also know that, in fact, a meeting is scheduled for next Wednesday between the CHC and the LHIN and the capital branch within the Ministry of Health to resolve, hopefully, any further outstanding issues and certainly provide that clarity and a timeline to the CHC so we can move forward on this important project.

I think we're all in agreement in terms of the importance of this. I know that it has been a significant period

of time to get to this point. My commitment to the member opposite is that I am personally involved, and I will do what I can to make sure that the correct decisions are made and they're made in as expeditious and responsible a manner as possible.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I have some introductions that I would like to bring to the House today. I would like to welcome my father, Ted Kiwala; my two daughters, Linnaea and Helene Kiwala; and my partner, Chris Van der Vyver, without whom I would probably not be standing here today.

I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to Katsitsiase Betty Maracle, Bear Clan, Mohawk Nation, Tyendinaga, and Laurel Claus-Johnson, a Mohawk Bear Clan community grandmother, a former VP of the Ontario Native Women's Association and a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

I would also like to welcome Bryan Bowers. He's of mixed settler and First Nations ancestry. He's a board member of the First Nations Technical Institute in Tyendinaga Mohawk territory and a board member of the Naval Marine Archive in Picton. Bryan is a former member of the OPP and Kingston city police.

A warm welcome to you all who have come from Kingston today to support my motion on missing and murdered aboriginal women.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome to our visitors.

I want to advise all members that the book of condolence for Corporal Nathan Cirillo is now set up in the main lobby. I appreciate your motion.

I know this is a little unorthodox because he left, but at the Speaker's will, I've always taken it upon myself to introduce all former members. In the east public gallery a little while ago was Mr. Rob Milligan, Northumberland-Quinte West in the 40th Parliament. I know he's doing the honourable thing today.

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

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Bill Walker: Can I just correct my record from this morning?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on a point of order?

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make sure that the Campbellford District High School was included with Mr. Rob Milligan, a former MPP, who was here from Northumberland-Quinte West. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's a correction of the record?

Mr. Bill Walker: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, okay. Thank you. Members have that right.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'd like to introduce Jennifer Pacco, who's in the gallery here. She's a resident of Brampton-Springdale who wanted to further know how Queen's Park works, so she's here to visit us for the day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEPWORTH-SHALLOW LAKE ROTARY CLUB

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise in the House today to congratulate the Hepworth-Shallow Lake Rotary Club on its 65th anniversary.

I had the honour of attending a special celebration on October 3, along with my friend MP Larry Miller, where we applauded all members, past and present, for their strong and sustained efforts in raising money for a great variety of causes, local and international, and to commend the hard work of the men and women who have been doing remarkable work since 1949.

I'd also like to recognize one of the club members, and a special friend of my family, Mr. Ed Ruth, who celebrated his 50th anniversary with the Hepworth-Shallow Lake Rotary Club. His is truly an exceptional achievement. Ed suffered an accident in his early 20s that resulted in the loss of one arm. This, however, did not slow Ed down. With wife Betty, who is always by his side, and children Allan, Loretta and Jerry to support, he simply took a positive attitude and pushed on. He endeavoured to do anything a person with two arms could do. A sight I will never forget, as a young boy, was watching Ed shovel gravel with one arm. He was and continues to be an inspiration.

He is a very successful businessman who continues to tinker in a variety of projects and is a valued contributing member of our community. One of the reasons he is able to move forward and become the success that he is was that the Hepworth-Shallow Lake Rotary Club stepped up and offered Ed and his family assistance immediately following his accident. This was a compelling reason for Ed to join Rotary in 1964, and he has remained an active member since.

I believe I speak for all of us in extending our sincere congratulations to Ed on being awarded the prestigious Paul Harris Fellow, the highest honour as a Rotarian, and for living the Rotary motto "Service Above Self."

Congratulations to Ed and also fellow Paul Harris recipients who were recognized for their contributions the same evening: Karen Neerhof, Cliff MacMillan and James (Jim) Noble.

We support and appreciate your tireless volunteering and wish you all the best of health and happiness in the future.

FEED THE NEED DURHAM

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Feed the Need Durham is an organization that provides food to nearly 50 member agencies across the Durham region and has an impact on the lives of over 30,000 low-income individuals every year. They were founded on the belief that hunger should not prevent anyone from fulfilling their potential, and they have worked tirelessly to this purpose.

I had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of their new facility in Oshawa earlier this month, a move they made to keep up with growing demand.

An incredible number of people are supported by incredible organizations like Feed the Need. Our priority, as MPPs, however, must be to address the need.

The government says they are committed to their Poverty Reduction Strategy, but with no targets or timelines in place it is hard to believe how committed they really are.

Nearly 400,000 Ontarians rely on food banks each month. In fact, nearly 50% of Canada's food bank users are Ontarians. It is our responsibility as MPPs to do everything in our power to improve the lives of the people of this province, and this is a group that we are failing.

Poverty is not a permanent condition, it is not a natural state and it does not have to be an enduring truth in Ontario. It's time to get serious about eradicating poverty in this province. So let's work together to set real targets, and then let's reach them. Then, maybe organizations like Feed the Need will no longer be needed in our province.

YVONNE ROWATT

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I rise today in memory of a dear friend, a beloved community leader and a remarkable woman who recently passed away.

Yvonne Rowatt was a devoted mother to Gillian and Geoff, loving wife to her husband, Ken, and a doting grandmother; but she will be remembered by many in Halton as a tireless volunteer, organizer and a champion for fairness, justice and democracy.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Yvonne well over the last few years, as did the member from Oakville. She was a dynamo, a woman who didn't understand the words "no" or "impossible." Perhaps what was most impressive was the boundless energy she poured into everything. Everyone around Yvonne was inspired to work a little harder, walk a little farther and stay on the phones just a little bit longer. She was a firecracker with a sharp wit and take-no-prisoners honesty. No one who spent more than a few moments with her forgot her. I know I certainly won't.

She was a force of nature; a woman with a loud laugh, a strong smile and a sense of fun. Her tireless spirit was matched only by her unwavering commitment to creating a better society and improving the lives of the less fortunate. She had a dream—a dream of a stronger Ontario and Canada—and she worked hard to make that dream a reality.

We will miss her energy. We will miss her infectious smile. We will miss her shoot-from-the-hip advice. We will miss Yvonne.

ONTARIO COLLEGE INFORMATION FAIR

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: On Tuesday, I had the opportunity to visit the Ontario College Information Fair right here in Toronto. Twenty-five colleges in Ontario had representatives at the fair to help students with their questions about all the programs each college has to offer. I think this is a great way to help students figure out what they want to take in college. It's a big step, and any guidance is going to go a long way to making sure these students end up where they want to be.

I have always stressed that we need more pathways from elementary and high school into colleges. It isn't enough to start thinking about post-secondary education in grades 11 and 12. I think teachers and schools should start entertaining the idea at an early age so that students know what is out there, whether it's a skilled-trade, college or a university education.

I'd like to commend the people who facilitate this information fair, and all the colleges and their representatives who spent the day with all the students who attended. I could tell each representative really wanted to help guide the students and give them as much information as possible.

When I arrived, I witnessed the busloads of students arriving from the various schools and the amount of parents who had taken their kids to the fair as well. I was also happy to hear that the Ontario College Information Fair expects about 10,000 students this year, and that that number is growing each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make this statement today, but I also appreciated the opportunity to attend the Ontario College Information Fair. I found it very, very rewarding.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Cindy Forster: Last Friday, while no one was watching, the Liberal government quietly announced changes to the computer system used to issue cheques to people on social assistance and ODSP. In a letter by the Ministry of Community and Social Services was a bombshell that could devastate some of this province's most vulnerable.

This new system allows the government to double the clawback rate on some overpayments made in error. For example, people who have health problems and received

a little bit more money to cope through a special diet allowance will now have to pay back any money they received by mistake at double the rate. According to the minister, this will “allow” the recipients to pay off their overpayments sooner. The overpayments “may have been incurred,” the minister says, through “a failure by a recipient to report a change of status.” Wow. Talk about blaming the victim.

There are a lot of reasons that this province is cash-strapped: eHealth, Ornge, cancelled gas plants—the list goes on and on. None of those scandals were caused by a single parent on social assistance in this province or a former factory worker who is now battling cancer with a special diet allowance from ODSP, yet this Liberal government tells them it’s their own fault.

1310

At a time when child poverty rates have reached epidemic proportions and folks on social assistance have less real income than they did when the Liberals came to power, it’s shameful for this government to be making up for its costly mistakes on the backs of the people who can least afford it.

OTTAWA–ORLÉANS
COMMUNITY BARBECUE
BARBECUE COMMUNAUTAIRE
À OTTAWA–ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I am very proud to announce that in my riding of Ottawa–Orléans I held my first community barbecue and corn roast this past summer to reach out to the citizens I represent. The event was held on August 28 at Petrie Island and it was a resounding success. Hundreds of individuals and their families came out to enjoy good food and entertainment.

This was also an opportunity for me to participate in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge to help raise funds and awareness to fight this terrible disease. Needless to say, everyone was quite amused to see me get soaked by a bucket of ice water thrown at me by my very own daughter, Monica. It was surely for a good cause and I’m proud that I did it.

I would like to say thank you to all the community leaders who attended. J’aimerais également remercier nos partenaires qui ont contribué généreusement à faire de cet événement un franc succès : Jennifer Sox et Troy Brown d’Enbridge, Little Ray’s Reptile Zoo, Sobeys, Hydro Ottawa et les pompiers de la ville d’Ottawa.

This day was very special for my riding, and I look forward to hosting my community again next summer at this great event.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I suspect your daughter hated every second of it.

BILL HEASLEY

Mr. Steve Clark: Among the many attributes making Leeds–Grenville a great place to live is the resolve of our

residents to meet any challenge. When there’s a problem in our community, people get to work and make things better.

I rise to celebrate one of those people: Bill Heasley. A former Brockville Citizen of the Year, Bill was also the first chair of the Brockville and district hospice palliative care telethon, an event that, 31 years later, has raised over \$3 million.

In 1999, Bill, from St. John Bosco Catholic Church, and his dear friend, the late Hank Gray from St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, saw another need: too many people in Brockville going hungry. They had a vision to create a low-cost restaurant, naming it after a well-known miracle from the Bible.

Loaves and Fishes opened in April 1999 and served 35 meals on the first of the three days it opened its doors that week. Their vision has grown in ways Bill and Hank likely never dreamed. Today, Loaves and Fishes opens five days a week and its kitchen serves up to 100 people daily—about 400 every week. In return for just \$1, diners find food to fill an empty stomach and fellowship to nourish a weary soul.

This summer, the Loaves and Fishes board paid a well-deserved tribute to Bill Heasley, who, after 15 years, is stepping down to focus on other charity work. He does so knowing that what he helped create will carry on as a source of great comfort for those less fortunate. That is something we can all aspire to.

CASA DO ALENTEJO

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Before I make my statement, I’d like to say that although yesterday was a difficult day for all of us, I’m very proud that we carried on with the obligation and privilege of governing. I would also like to offer my condolences to the family and friends of Corporal Nathan Cirillo. I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the legislative security service and the Sergeant-at-Arms for their hard work and dedication in keeping us safe.

Today I’d like to take a moment to recognize the Casa do Alentejo community centre from my great riding of Davenport. Members of this incredible organization joined us in the House for question period on Tuesday, along with two dignitaries from Portugal and a seniors’ choir from the University of Aljustrel. It was a pleasure showing them around Queen’s Park.

Casa do Alentejo was founded in 1983 as an incorporated, not-for-profit community centre. It is a volunteer-based and volunteer-run organization with many dedicated members, such as Rosa de Sousa, who has been there since day one, and its current president, Carlos de Sousa. Together these volunteers work very hard to promote Portuguese culture and heritage by organizing dinners, themed events, theatre, and folklore festivals.

This year marks Casa do Alentejo’s 31st anniversary. That means that for 31 years they have been contributing to the diverse cultural mosaic that is this wonderful

province of ours. They do this by organizing all of these wonderful events that bring people together.

Casa do Alentejo was also the first organization to promote Cultural Weeks, a showcase of Portuguese culture that brings together speakers from Portugal, Canada and abroad. These weeks often include musical performances, book launches and other artistic events.

This year's Alentejo Cultural Week runs until October 25. I wish them my sincere congratulations on their anniversary and on what has been another very, very successful cultural week.

ROGER CONANT

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's with sadness that I rise today to inform the Legislature of the passing of the Honourable Roger Gordon Conant this past Monday, October 20. I'd like to express my deepest sympathies to my constituent Armand Conant and his family on the passing of his father, the Honourable Roger Gordon Conant.

Born on May 26, 1922, in Ottawa, Roger Conant was the son of Ontario's 12th Premier, Gordon D. Conant, and Verna Conant.

Justice Conant was a graduate of the University of Toronto and Osgoode Hall Law School.

He served in the infantry during World War II, landing on the beaches of Normandy with the British army, rose to the rank of major and was awarded the Canadian Forces' Decoration.

Justice Conant was appointed to the District Court of Ontario in 1977—it's now the Superior Court of Ontario—and he was a distinguished jurist who earned the respect of the entire legal community.

After retiring from the Superior Court of Ontario, Justice Conant continued to serve as a public servant and was appointed to the Canada Pension Appeals Board.

In his spare time, he was an avid sailor and a proud member of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club for over 70 years.

Our thoughts are with his family. Please join me today in remembering and recognizing a truly great and distinguished Ontarian and Canadian.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements—even the ones that were longer.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BENSFORT WOOD INC. ACT, 2014

Ms. Scott moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr3, An Act to revive Bensfort Wood Inc.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

RESPECT FOR VETERANS ACT (PLACING DONATION BOXES FOR REMEMBRANCE DAY POPPIES IN MEMBERS' OFFICES), 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LE RESPECT DES ANCIENS COMBATTANTS (PLACEMENT DANS LES BUREAUX DES DÉPUTÉS DE BOÎTES DE DONNS POUR LES COQUELICOTS DU JOUR DU SOUVENIR)

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to amend the Members' Integrity Act, 1994 with respect to the placing of donation boxes for Remembrance Day Poppies in members' offices / *Projet de loi 34, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1994 sur l'intégrité des députés en ce qui concerne le placement dans leurs bureaux de boîtes de dons pour les coquelicots du jour du Souvenir.*

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, veterans fought to defend our freedom and to maintain our democracy. In recognition of this sacrifice, the bill amends the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, to confirm that members of the Ontario Legislature are permitted to show respect for veterans by allowing donation boxes for Remembrance Day poppies in their offices.

1320

I had planned for some time to introduce this bill today, but the events of yesterday have made me even more determined to ensure that we are showing respect for our veterans in every way possible.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed. Minister?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items number 7, 8 and 12 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour moves that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items number 7, 8 and 12 be waived. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ASTHMA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

“Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

“Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it over to page Rachel.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Han Dong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario is home to over 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Hispanic Canadians who originate from the 23 Hispanic countries around the world; and who have made significant contributions to the growth and vibrancy of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas October is a month of great significance for the Hispanic community worldwide; and allows an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about the outstanding achievements of Hispanic peoples to our province’s social, economic and multicultural fabric;

“We, the undersigned, call upon members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming October of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month and support Bill 28 by” the honourable member from Davenport.

Now I give my petition to page Darren, and I affix my signature to it.

ASTHMA

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Ryan’s Fight: Asthma Awareness.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

“Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

“Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards.”

I’ll be speaking in support of this this afternoon. I’ll hand this to page Raveen.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario is home to over 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Hispanic Canadians who originate from the 23 Hispanic countries around the world; and who have made significant contributions to the growth and vibrancy of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas October is a month of great significance for the Hispanic community worldwide; and allows an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about the outstanding achievements of Hispanic peoples to our province’s social, economic and multicultural fabric;

“We, the undersigned, call upon members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming October of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month and support Bill 28 by MPP Cristina Martins from the riding of Davenport.”

I’m going to affix my name to this and pass it off to page Colston.

ASTHMA

Mr. Michael Harris: I also have a petition, “Ryan’s Fight: Asthma Awareness.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

“Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

“Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards.”

Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with this petition, will sign it, and I will send it down with page Callum to the table.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas it is absolutely crucial that more is done to provide Ontarians retirement financial security which they can rely on;

“Whereas the federal government has refused to partner with our government to ensure that Ontarians have a secure retirement plan;

“Whereas more than three million Ontarians rely on the Canada Pension Plan alone, that currently does not provide enough to support an adequate standard of living;

“Whereas the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will provide the safe and stable retirement that Ontarians need;

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

“That all members of the Ontario assembly support a plan to move forward with an Ontario-made pension retirement plan that will provide a financially secure retirement for Ontarians.”

I affix my signature to the petition and send it to the Clerk with Katie.

ASTHMA

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

“Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

“Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards.”

While Rachel waits one second, I will be honoured to affix my signature to this petition.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government is committed to providing the right care, at the right place, at the right time, and by the right health care professional; and

“Whereas patients that are not satisfied with their care deserve the opportunity to voice their concerns and seek resolutions to their complaints; and

“Whereas patients sometimes need a third party to turn to when they have exhausted all local complaint resolution processes; and

“Whereas a patient ombudsman would facilitate the resolution of complaints, investigate health sector organizations, and make recommendations to further strengthen Ontario’s health care sector;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 8, and create a patient ombudsman.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Meher to submit to the Clerk.

ASTHMA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I found another petition on my desk here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

“Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

“Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards.”

I again sign my signature to this petition and hand it in to page Raveen.

1330

SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I too found a petition here, and would like to present this to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the provincial code of conduct governs every school board in Ontario;

“Whereas the provincial code of conduct provides direction for the creation and implementation of the code of conduct for all school boards;

“Whereas subsection 301(1) of part XIII of the Education Act states that ‘the minister may establish a code of conduct governing the behaviour of all persons in schools’;

“Whereas the current provincial code of conduct does not explicitly state the trustees are also required to adhere to this code of conduct;

“Whereas the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) trustees held a planning and priorities committee meeting on October 1, 2014;

“Whereas some members of the planning and priorities committee behaved unprofessionally and made racial overtone remarks at the October 1, 2014, meeting; and

“Whereas some members of the planning and priorities committee violated both the provincial code of conduct and the TDSB code of conduct;

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

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly amend subsection 301(1) of part XIII of the Education Act to explicitly state the code of conduct also applies to trustees; and

"That members of the Legislative Assembly amend the current provincial code of conduct to explicate the conduct and behaviours of trustees."

Mr. Speaker, I agree full-heartedly with this petition. I'm going to sign it and give it to page Jamie.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, the previous member John O'Toole always said, "Have an extra petition in your desk," and I have found another petition here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and families are not being properly supported in southwestern Ontario;

"Whereas the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Community and Social Services need to develop a comprehensive care strategy that appoints a lead ministry with the responsibility for coordinating FASD management and prevention efforts;

"Whereas the provincial government needs to reallocate funding to increase FASD diagnostic and treatment capacity in Ontario, increase community and educational supports and increase prevention efforts across the province;

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

"That the government of Ontario take a cross-ministerial approach in developing a comprehensive care strategy that supports and promotes best practices in FASD management and prevention and provides appropriate supports for individuals with FASD so that they may access the necessary services."

I again agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government is committed to providing the right care, at the right place, at the right time, and by the right health care professional; and

"Whereas patients that are not satisfied with their care deserve the opportunity to voice their concerns and seek resolutions to their complaints; and

"Whereas patients sometimes need a third party to turn to when they have exhausted all local complaint resolution processes; and

"Whereas a patient ombudsman would facilitate the resolution of complaints, investigate health sector organizations, and make recommendations to further strengthen Ontario's health care sector;

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

"That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 8, and create a patient ombudsman."

I fully support the petition, and I will give my petition to page Noah.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

HIGHWAY INCIDENT MANAGEMENT ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LA GESTION DES INCIDENTS DE LA ROUTE

Mrs. Martow moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to require the establishment of an advisory committee to make recommendations to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for the improvement of highway incident management / Projet de loi 30, Loi exigeant la constitution d'un comité consultatif pour formuler des recommandations au ministre des Transports et au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels en ce qui concerne l'amélioration de la gestion des incidents de la route.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to thank those who have given me their time, effort and knowledge in order to bring to fruition Bill 30, An Act to require the establishment of an advisory committee to make recommendations to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for the improvement of highway incident management. Many professionals were consulted at multiple stages of this bill, and their insight and advice was instrumental in constructing it. I thank them for their efforts.

The purpose of this bill is clear and simple: to improve our highways. To date, our ability to quickly and effectively clear accidents off our highways is lacking. In too many incidences, our emergency response times are far too slow and our technology is too outdated to provide Ontarians with the support they need after an accident. As such, improving road safety and efficiency should be of utmost importance to all of us. Establishing a committee that would be required to report their findings on various issues currently plaguing Ontario's roads would be a giant step toward achieving a much-needed improvement to our highways.

Highways in southern Ontario, particularly in the greater Toronto area, are among the busiest in the world. Just one section of Highway 401 in Toronto has a daily traffic count of close to 400,000 vehicles. With such high use, it is easy to see how even one accident can affect Ontario's road system and all of its users. Highway stoppages and closures for any length of time have severe social and economic impacts on all Ontario residents. Inefficient accident management results in far too many missed business meetings, family outings or other important personal events because of traffic blockages on Ontario roadways. It also directly correlates to a loss in personal and government revenue—revenue that we so desperately need to fund our health care, education and social programs.

Bill 30 requires the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to convene an advisory committee comprised of individuals and staff who are experts in traffic incident management to look at four major issues with regard to highway safety and accident management, and report back within eight months after its establishment. They are as follows:

- (1) providing public education programs to improve driver behaviour in circumstances involving highway incidents;
- (2) reducing the time for appropriate authorities to detect and verify highway incidents and to clear highways after the occurrence of highway incidents;
- (3) providing timely and accurate information about highway incidents to drivers; and
- (4) enhancing the safety and security of Ontario's highways.

It is high time that we begin to address the benefits of improving highway incident management. Let's begin by taking a closer look at some of the crippling issues that we as Ontarians face on our highways.

First of all, we all know that in Ontario, traffic is one of the biggest challenges we face. Daily commute times can sometimes reach over two hours during rush hour, preventing residents from getting to or from home and work in time for important business, personal or family events. With one of the longest commute times in North America, our government should be doing everything it can to alleviate the stress of driving on our highways.

Secondly, there are too many accidents on our highways. With so many people in a rush, drivers tend to ignore speed limits and other safety precautions, forgetting everything they have learned in driver's ed and instead opting for the fastest and most convenient, yet oftentimes not safest, choices while driving. Accidents are what take normal rush hour traffic and turn rush hour sluggish for hours.

Thirdly, emergency vehicles often have difficulty reaching accident sites quickly. This causes unnecessary delays in reopening the highways and endangers the lives of individuals affected by an accident. Slow emergency response times are detrimental to those injured by the

initial accident as well as every driver who follows behind the accident scene.

Finally, an adequate supply of modern equipment and trained staff is required to conduct effective and fast incident investigations. As it stands, incident investigators cite a lack of such equipment. This greatly increases the time required for necessary police investigations before clearing of the highway can take place.

It also means that we as a province are not keeping up with the times. Many states in the US have begun creating task forces to streamline their highway incident management protocols into manuals and useful policies that have cut average delay times in half. Florida's open roads policy has been particularly successful, and I encourage everyone to take a look at their program.

1340

Other major cities such as Atlanta and Las Vegas have also adopted similar task forces in combination with their Georgia and Nevada state counterparts.

Through the establishment of a qualified committee, Ontario will obtain a more holistic understanding of best practices for highway incident management. This will include issues that are often overlooked, such as protecting emergency service workers at the scene of an accident, distinguishing roles for various types of emergency service personnel at the scene of an accident, and the extent of a public servant's liability for the actions they take while at the scene of an accident.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a couple of examples of overlooked issues when it comes to managing accidents on the highway. Some of the more obvious issues that I foresee the committee addressing are: providing generic recommendations to enhance the overall safety and security of Ontario's highways; increasing public education programs to improve driver awareness and behaviour at the scene of an accident; finding alternative and more effective methods of capturing photographs for insurance purposes; and updating and improving overall highway technology to (a) prevent accidents in all driving conditions, (b) alert future highway users to stoppages and road closures, and (c) provide alternative routes to highway users.

I recently met representatives of the 407 electronic toll route. They discussed efforts under way to implement a helicopter-type drone used to photograph major collisions in an attempt to hasten the opening of highways after an incident. This is actually a pilot project that they're working on and studying with the OPP. They use small drones in the air that shoot approximately 150 photos of each crash site. The whole process takes about 15 minutes, and it's supervised by operators on the ground that are operating the drones. The pictures are later electronically stitched together. I'm told that the same job on the ground can take up to three hours. Safety officials and incident investigators have anticipated that, in most cases, this will definitely reduce time on the scene and, in turn, the amount of time that the roads have to be closed.

There are four major issues that affect highway closure time: restoration of the highway because the

highways can be damaged by accidents; towing services—how long it takes for towing services to get to the accident scene; recovery time; and personal injuries and, unfortunately, sometimes fatalities.

These are not insurmountable problems. Setting up a committee to streamline procedures such as what equipment is necessary for what type of incident is just one of the many ways to alleviate traffic congestion as a result of an incident.

Implementing improvements to the province's highway incident management protocol should be a high priority for the government. Keeping highways fast, efficient and effective is critical to the economic prosperity of our province. Creating a committee is the first step towards establishing a more streamlined approach to what is fast becoming a rampant problem across Ontario.

The positive effects of what a committee may find with regard to improved highway incident management are numerous and substantial. They include but are not limited to:

Improved public health and safety: When emergency vehicles can reach the scene of an accident quickly, they can begin life-saving and highway-clearing procedures more efficiently. Reducing the number and duration of highway incidents can also have a positive impact on reducing vehicle emissions and improving air quality.

Improved driver behaviour: The possibility of joint public and private drivers' ed programs with sections devoted to highway accident behaviour would educate drivers on how to behave if they are caught in an incident on the highway. This would substantially improve driver awareness and help to reduce road rage or aggressive reactions from other drivers.

Enhanced competitiveness: Economic efficiency results when goods and labour can arrive at their destinations in a timely and predictable manner. This does not happen when incidents on the highway slow traffic. Additionally, a committee would be able to review best practices for the recovery of goods and valued objects should a tow truck be involved in an accident. I meant a truck, not a tow truck, so I apologize.

Investment in our province: A reputation for efficient transportation systems can be an important Ontario asset when economic development players are selling the province as an investment location.

Fewer disruptions to local communities when highways are closed: Coordinating rerouting of major highway traffic through secondary roads as required under road closure action plans can reduce the impacts on traffic flow. Better road efficiency can lead to increased private investment in transportation partnerships. With better traffic flow, private sector transportation and engineering consortia can recognize the benefits of investing in transportation projects that can lead to investments and improvements in our system of highways.

And we could be a model, obviously, for other Canadian jurisdictions.

Once an incident is detected and confirmed, the response and clearance must be managed so as to pre-

serve and protect human life, maintain a reasonable level of safety for all participants, minimize delays to the travelling public, and minimize damage to public and private property. In a major incident, these are complex and often competing factors. Successful incident management can be facilitated by high-tech equipment, but is largely dependent on inter-agency coordination, education and on-site personnel. Once again, and excuse me for sounding a bit repetitive, the establishment of a committee is the first step in streamlining all of these complicated facets.

We can do better. Other cities, states and nations have been upstaging us in this area for years. We should be ashamed at our lacklustre and hodgepodge response protocol. Right now, drivers don't even know the rules of the road. They don't know their responsibilities when they're in an accident.

What I'm asking the Ministers of Transportation and Community Safety and Correctional Services to do with the passage of Bill 30 is to convene an advisory committee that aims to tackle these issues with innovative solutions. It's time to make our highways safer and more enjoyable for all Ontarians. It's time to feel confident about our highway system, and to have a plan in place that puts Ontario back on top as a world leader in efficiency and traffic flow. It's time for Ontarians to spend more time doing the things that matter to them, instead of getting stuck behind an accident. It's time to do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for all their interest. It is with that in mind that I hope that all of you will support Bill 30.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to stand in this House today and speak on this bill, Bill 30, an Act to require the establishment of an advisory committee to make recommendations to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for the improvement of highway incident management. I wholeheartedly support this initiative, just to start off.

For us in northern Ontario, and in southern Ontario, too—I live in a place where there's not as much traffic as here, but once a week I drive down here to have the ability to speak in this Legislature; tomorrow morning I drive back home. You have traffic problems here. You have gridlock problems. You have accident problems, and they could be better managed. But the one thing I'd like to concentrate on in the time I have is that it's not just the number of cars that causes the problem, because we also have the same problems in northern Ontario.

One of the greatest issues that I face with my constituents—we have the Trans-Canada Highway running through my constituency, Highway 11, and a large portion of it—when there's an accident there, and they have to manage the accident and investigate, and they close that portion of the highway, there's no other way to get around.

In my riding, sometimes in the wintertime, a lot of times these accidents are caused by bad road conditions. That's a whole other issue, but sometimes that highway is closed for eight or 10 hours to investigate an accident. There's no detour. You can have a young family in a car, or seniors in a car—we used to have a train; there's not much public transportation, and if you're in the bus, which wasn't wheelchair-accessible until the last couple of weeks, it's also stuck there for eight or 10 hours.

If you think about that, you're putting people's lives at risk—not just the people who are driving, but the people who are waiting. There are actually, in small communities in my riding, some volunteer organizations that are prepared for this, because they know that, if the highway is closed, there are people stranded in those cars. We have to find a better way to manage that.

1350

So, if and when this committee is struck, I'd like to take this opportunity to make sure that it's not just to look at where most of Ontarians are; it's to look at where all Ontarians live, and the different things they all face. I've held meetings with the OPP and with many people in the community, because we have big issues. We solved some of them, and we've solved some of them in this House. We've pushed like crazy for more snowplows. Road conditions have changed, because equipment on the roads has changed. The government has said, "Well, there are more plows on the road. It's safer." Well, in my district, when it used to be MTO, in the New Liskeard area there were 1,500 in that region. There were 1,500 plows, and now there are 1,000 in northern Ontario. I believe it was 66 and 40 in mine. Anyway, it's still less. But that's another discussion. We have to find a way to manage accidents; to manage what happens after the accident.

I'll give you an example. In my riding, just when you come off Highway 11 where I live, there's a big sign. I don't know how much this thing cost, but it's one of those like you have on the 401; you know, "Express lanes moving slowly." You know those signs. We have them, too. So they have a really big one on the Cobalt cut-off. There have been times when the highway has been closed, but they don't change the sign. If the accident is before Martin River, they let the people drive to where they're stranded. We've talked to the OPP, and they're as frustrated as we are because the OPP can't change that sign. The person who can change the sign at MTO or at the contractor's isn't on duty at night.

There are things we could look at that aren't rocket science and that aren't millions of dollars, which could make a huge difference in people's lives.

If and when this committee is struck, I hope it's not a committee that's just in an office tower somewhere here and has no real understanding of what happens in the far reaches of Ontario, because sometimes it's just as simple as giving someone the right to change a sign. It would make such a huge difference.

Again, where they put that sign: About 10 kilometres before the sign, there's a cut-off. If you take that cut-off

when the road is closed, you have to go into Quebec, but you can get to Toronto via Quebec. But once you pass that cut-off, you can't do that any longer. Do they put the big sign at the cut-off? No. They put the big sign 20 clicks past the cut-off, but then they compensate by not changing the sign anyway. Those are the things we have to look at, because in the end those things could cost people's lives. It's not just about gridlock—and gridlock is a tough thing; it's about people's lives.

I hope this committee is created, and I hope it looks at all parts of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke Centre.

It's a pleasure to stand in the Legislature this afternoon to speak to Bill 30, the reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow act. The premise of the bill is reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow, and it would require the government to create an advisory committee. Certainly the current Minister of Transportation, whom I've personally known for over 20 years—if there is anybody who is open to consultation with stakeholders and listening, it is this minister, as have other ministers. I know this minister will certainly be listening to stakeholders across the province on how we can improve our highways.

But the real essence of reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow is not simply having an advisory committee; it's about actions. This government has taken a number of actions precisely to reduce gridlock and improve traffic flow, initiatives like the move-over program. If you see a first responder, a police cruiser, at the side of the road when there's some kind of an incident, move over; ensure there are safer traffic conditions for the remaining traffic to be able to flow and so that the first responder is safe and the people they are giving assistance to can be safe. That's a very simple and a very tangible initiative that this government implemented that makes a difference every day.

Of course, accident prevention is also probably one of the best ways to reduce the issues that the member from Thornhill is raising.

I heard in the Legislature this morning the Minister of Transportation rise and announce that an additional 50 winter maintenance vehicles will be on the roads of southern Ontario. Those vehicles will be improving the road conditions for motorists throughout southern Ontario, which will lead to fewer accidents, which will lead to those roads being more passable, traffic flowing more smoothly, more quickly. That's a very tangible thing that this government is doing to improve gridlock and improve traffic flow.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Look at the other side of the map.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I understand the minister already introduced similar measures in northern Ontario last year. This government is looking province-wide at how we can improve traffic.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: See, I saved you. You can't say I've never done anything for you.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: There's a troubling echo in this chamber, Mr. Speaker, that I'm still getting used to.

Of course, another way to reduce gridlock and improve traffic flow is to build and expand our road system. This government is making unprecedented investments in 407 east, in extending the 401 corridor in the western part of this province, in extending the 404 north and many other improvements.

We've introduced HOV lanes, which also improve traffic flow and reduce gridlock.

We're introducing bus priority lanes in parts of the GTA to allow public transit vehicles that carry far more people than an individual vehicle to move more quickly, to get people to where they need to go more quickly, whether it's to work or school in the morning or home in the evening.

These are all tangible things that this government is doing to reduce gridlock and improve traffic flow, and not simply striking an advisory committee, as important and as valuable as that might be.

Of course, another key initiative to reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow is giving people other choices in how to move around this province, improving their mobility. The \$29-billion investment in public transit in the province of Ontario—\$15 billion within the GTA, \$14 billion in other parts of the province—is going to have a tremendous impact on reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow. If only another government back in the 1990s had built the public transit that was already on the books and approved at that time, we would have saved Ontarians billions of dollars in lost time and burnt fuel that could have already been saved. We could have reduced gridlock and improved traffic flow much earlier. But this government is committed to doing that and we are doing that today with construction projects which are under way on Eglinton, on the Yonge-University-Spadina line, in Mississauga, in Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa, and elsewhere throughout the province.

This government has shown more commitment to reducing gridlock and improving traffic flow than any other government in the history of this province. We will continue to do this over the next decade with our \$130-billion investment in transit and transportation. But I do welcome the member from Thornhill and her ideas on how we can do even better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I believe the member from Etobicoke Centre has some remarks as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: It is a pleasure today to speak to Bill 30, the Highway Incident Management Act, brought forth by my colleague from Thornhill, Gila Martow.

1400

This act would obviously establish an advisory committee to make recommendations for the improvement of highway incident management.

There is no one in this House who hasn't experienced the frustration, the delays, the gridlock, the wasted fuel, time and money resulting from a collision, minor or major, many kilometres up the road as the long line of stopped and slowed traffic approaches the incident location. Your one-hour trip stretches into two or three, and you begin to wonder: Will you ever make it to your destination? We all understand the impacts—the missed deadlines, the missed appointments, the missed family moments—in addition to the environmental and pocket-book concerns, as our vehicles burn up the fuel and money before pouring the emissions out the exhaust pipe. There is probably not a week that goes by that motorists travelling to, from and through the GTA aren't subjected to these situations.

Instead of throwing our hands up and allowing the shared frustration to build, I commend my colleague for bringing forward some positive action steps to help get us moving in the right direction.

As we've heard, Bill 30 requires the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and the commissioner of the OPP to establish an advisory committee to analyze highway incident management and to develop a comprehensive program for improvement.

Specifically, the proposed legislation calls on the committee to report and make recommendations on the following:

- (1) public education programs to improve driver behaviour in highway incidents;
- (2) reducing the time for authorities to detect and verify incidents and clear our highways;
- (3) of course, providing timely and accurate highway incident information to drivers; and
- (4) enhancing the safety and security of Ontario highways.

Given that gridlock is still the number one issue in the GTHA, I feel that while we look at ways to provide more transportation options, it's well past time that we should examine what can be done to reduce the impact of one of the key causes of gridlock. Sadly, as long as we operate vehicles, we will never be able to avoid completely the occurrence of vehicle accidents, so we have a responsibility to ensure we are doing all we can to reduce the ensuing impacts that we see on virtually a daily basis. I think I speak for everyone in this House when I say that we could all benefit from the improved traffic flow, reduced gridlock and enhanced safety goals that are at the heart of the Highway Incident Management Act, and I look forward to seeing it receive the support of our colleagues across the floor to move this initiative forward.

Thank you, Speaker, for the time, and I'd like to thank my colleague from Thornhill again for bringing forward Bill 30.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I too want to rise in support of this legislation. I will just start off by saying that private members' hour is always a good forum by which

members such as this one are able to bring forward ideas that otherwise may not come up under the regular processes of government, to be able to bring these forward for debate in this Legislature so that we can reflect on them, hopefully pass a bill and, if not, have the government deal with the matter, either by way of a bill or by way of an initiative. I just want to say that the idea is a good one, in the sense of bringing people together in order to be able to deal with these issues.

But I want to speak to the general condition of our roads across this province as one of the issues that could be dealt with under this bill. We have seen—it started under the Conservatives when Mr. Harris was the Premier of Ontario, and then it was accelerated under the Liberals. We used to have this hybrid system of winter road maintenance where the Ministry of Transportation owned about 50% of the rolling stock necessary—not rolling stock, but sand trucks and snowplows needed to maintain our highways to a certain standard, and then the other 50% was contracted in to the ministry, by use of contractors, when needed. It was a good system, because what it did is that it allowed us to have a certain capacity as a province to clean our highways, but at the same time utilized the private sector to augment where it made some sense to do that. It was a good system, and it was a very inexpensive system, comparatively.

The Tories privatized it. The Liberals then accelerated the privatization to heights never known before, even though they were opposed to this when they were in opposition. And we now have this system where it's completely privatized, where contractors are locked into contracts, where the standards of maintaining our highways are less than what they were at the time the ministry used to maintain the roads themselves.

The way they did this—and it was Kathleen Wynne as the Minister of Transportation who did a great part of this—is that they negotiated with area maintenance contractors where they lowered the circuit time. They said, “You have to maintain highways to the classification level as described by the Ministry of Transportation in its operating manuals, and here is the way that you're going to do this.” But they lowered the circuit times, which means to say the amount of time that a plow will pass by your door a second time once a snowstorm comes. In other words, if you live on Highway 17 somewhere, when the plow drives by your house because you live on the highway, it would normally come back a lot faster a second time—because the circuit time is the time it takes to do the whole route and to come back to the original point. What we've now got is that the circuit times have been, in some cases, as much as tripled.

We wonder why our highways are not maintained to the degree that they used to be before? It's very simple. The government not only privatized the system but they then told the contractors, “Here's a lesser standard to which you'll maintain the road,” and then they say, “It's all your fault if the highway is not plowed.” Well, it's the government who negotiated the contract. It's the government who established the lower circuit times in the

contracts, so it should be the government's responsibility to make sure that the highways are maintained.

Because of pressures put on by the public, by mayors of northern Ontario and by members such as myself, Mr. Vanthof, Madame Gélinas and others, the government went out and bought some more equipment. To that, we say, “Good.” They did some of that last year; they're doing some of it again this year.

I just want to say again, if you don't lower the circuit times, we're going to have a lot more plows running around doing the same job but the circuit times are really not going to diminish. Most of that equipment is going to be used where we've got four-laning. If you have a highway that has just single lanes, the circuit time—let's say it used to be two hours—it's now probably more like four or five hours. Now what's going to happen is, they are going to at least have enough equipment on four lanes or in passing lanes in order to do it in that two to four hours, but the roads will not be any better maintained.

I hope that this particular committee, should it ever be struck, is able to do what this government needs, which is to come to terms with the issue of circuit times.

I prefer that we return to the former system, where we had our own internal plows and sand trucks in order to do the work that had to be done, and utilize contractors to augment what we did. If you're going to go to a private system, at least put into the contracts circuit times that allow us to maintain roads to the standard; otherwise, we're going to continue to see roads in the condition that they are.

Last year was atrocious, the year before that was atrocious, and those were the first years in my area where those area maintenance contracts came in place. I can tell you, our roads are dangerous. There have been accidents because of it. People are now regularly choosing not to drive whenever they see a snowflake, let alone a snowfall. Why? Because we have learned in northern Ontario that if it snows, the circuit times are going to mean that the plow is not going to come by very often and you're going to be putting yourself and others at risk by driving the highway.

I call upon the government to put inside these contracts a change that allows the circuit times to be diminished so that we are able to have the condition of highways that we were used to in this province prior to the Liberals becoming Tories in a hurry when they contracted all of this out.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to speak to this issue.

Just before I do, I'd just like to take this brief opportunity to extend my condolences on behalf of the people of Etobicoke Centre to the family of Mr. Cirillo, the soldier who was killed yesterday in Ottawa, and to extend our thanks to all the men and women in uniform in our great country, both those who protect our freedoms abroad and those who protect our safety and security here at home.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue, and I thank the member opposite for raising the issues that are touched

on in this bill. Road safety is critical; we all know that. If you haven't been personally involved, we all know someone who has been involved in some sort of road accident. I certainly have had that in my family and can appreciate the impact that that would have.

As the Premier said yesterday in a different context, the security of the people of Ontario is paramount. We need to ensure that. So is making sure that people move quickly through our roads. Whether they be in urban environments or rural environments, we need to make sure that people are moving safely, securely and efficiently. That's foundational to the strength of our economy.

1410

There are a number of things that this government is doing currently, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to highlight. First of all, I think one of the things to look to is the fact that we have some of the safest roads in North America. The data bears this out. The Ministry of Transportation supports actions to reduce gridlock and improve traffic flow. That's because we understand that good traffic flow, safe traffic flow, is critical to our quality of life and to our economy.

Our goal should be to safely manage highway incidents as quickly as possible. We have to make sure that emergency services have arrived and that any injured parties have received care and the police have completed their investigation. This has to be paramount as we think about clearing our highways. The ministry continues to work with the Ontario Provincial Police and other stakeholders to ensure that congestion is not prolonged due to highway incidents and their investigations.

For the past 13 years, we've been ranked either first or second in North America for road safety. Despite this record, there's still more work to be done. On average, one person is killed on our roads every 18 hours and one person is injured every eight and a half minutes. There are a number of things that are being done through the ministry, and I'd like to highlight just a few of them in the remaining time I have.

The work that the ministry does with the OPP, local police services and safety stakeholders to protect motorists through campaigns that address unsafe behaviours—the ministry has run numerous awareness campaigns and has strict legislation on impaired, distracted, aggressive and careless driving. This directly contributes to protecting roadside assistance drivers, stranded motorists, enforcement officers, construction and maintenance workers and others.

MTO recently worked with the Canadian Automobile Association to develop their stranded motorists campaign. This campaign helps to educate motorists on what to do at the roadside in the event of a breakdown or a collision, which is an issue that the member opposite raised as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to look at this in a comprehensive way, and I'd like to echo the thoughts of the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore in that regard. Making sure that our roads work well and making sure

that they're safe means looking at this in a holistic way. There are a number of things that the ministry is doing and the government is doing—I've highlighted some of those—and we will be doing.

One of the things that the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore mentioned that I'd like to emphasize, as well, is the introduction of a new bill this week, the highway traffic act, which will make our roads safer. Some of the things that are part of that are: increasing fines for distracted driving from the current range of \$60 to \$500 to a range of \$300 to \$1,000—again, this is all about discouraging distracted driving, which I think we all agree is something that we need to address—applying current alcohol-impaired sanctions to drivers who are drug-impaired—this is an important aspect of this—and introducing additional measures to address repeat offenders. These are some of the things that can help us prevent accidents, prevent some of the gridlock and prevent some of the issues that the members opposite raised, in terms of people waiting for accidents to be cleared. One way of doing that is preventing the accidents in the first place, and we're doing a lot on that front.

Another thing we're doing is helping municipalities collect unpaid fines by expanding licence plate denial for drivers who do not pay their fines.

These are all elements of making sure that our roads are safer.

The other thing I want to mention, Mr. Speaker—and we were talking about the importance of a comprehensive approach—is to think about infrastructure as well. It's not just one-off pieces of legislation. We really need a broad approach. Since 2003, we've invested \$100 billion in infrastructure, and a lot of that has gone to transportation. We will be investing \$130 billion more in infrastructure over the next 10 years, \$29 billion of which is going to transportation. This is a critical element of making sure that our roads have the capacity to handle the demand that we put on them every single day, all across our province.

In summary, the issues that have been raised are important issues. I think we need to look at these issues holistically. We need to look at infrastructure. We need to look at how we're executing some of the legislation that we currently have on the books. Much of what has been mentioned in this bill is already being worked on and addressed by the Ministry of Transportation.

I think the bill, as proposed, is something that we can put through the committee process and look through what is already being done and what needs to be done, to make sure we take a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues of road safety and efficiency and effectiveness for the betterment of security of all Ontarians, and to make sure that our economy continues to thrive.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: As too many Ontario commuters know, gridlock is getting worse and worse, especially in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. It is becoming

more difficult to move on our roadways. Whether it's on the highway or in the city, the movement of people and business is needlessly stalled by gridlock, costing Ontario \$6 billion in lost productivity every year. By 2031, this congestion will cost us \$15 billion in lost productivity.

Gridlock: The very sound of the word sends blood pressures up and patience down. Across the GTHA and beyond, more and more people turn into commuters stuck in gridlock. Their engines are running. Their frustration is growing. Their tempers are flaring. Illegal phone calls are made. And you're stuck for anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes.

Our province has a major infrastructure deficit. Ontario's transportation and transit infrastructure has not been modified and built upon to keep up with the needs of our citizens and businesses, and in no way is it ready for tomorrow. For instance, until the 404 opened to Woodbine, there had been no change in the road network, but the population has more than doubled. It has taken too long to expand our infrastructure to accommodate the growing population. We need better planning that looks to future growth, because we cannot rely on the infrastructure that we have had for the past 40 years to last another 40 years.

It is interesting to note that nearly all of Ontario's infrastructure was built by successive Progressive Conservative governments during the 20th century. Progressive Conservatives built this province. Twenty-one of the last 30 years have been governed by Liberal or NDP governments. This is the reason we have the infrastructure deficit that we do. The job was simply not done. Money was dithered and squandered away that should have built kilometres of new subway and hundreds of kilometres of new, better-designed roads.

So we don't have the appropriate transit to give drivers a real alternative to their cars. We don't have new roads that can better handle the size of today's rush-hour surges. We don't even have the railway tracks we did years ago, if we wanted to encourage rail transport.

Heavy traffic, often caused by accidents, affects the environment and people's quality of life.

The bill introduced by my colleague seeks to establish an advisory committee to make recommendations for the improvement of highway incident management. When there is an accident on our roads, anything from a stalled car, loose load, flood, fire or highway repair, the traffic flow is impacted. Many times these incidents don't seem to be managed by authorities in a way that is helpful to the other users of the road. We need to be able to solve emergencies that arise on a daily basis efficiently and in a way that lets the rest of the traffic flow easily. These highway incidents are at the root of much of the gridlock we experience.

This bill would enable an expert committee to provide recommendations for better traffic management so that we can implement solutions to mitigate the gridlock that is created by disruption and accidents. This bill will help solve some of the gridlock problem.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: As a former mayor of South Glengarry, a municipality which includes Highway 401, and a user of the highway to get back and forth to Queen's Park, I want to commend my colleague the member from Thornhill for taking up this bill. The 401 is a very important—and the 400-series highways; I don't want to limit it to the 401—a very serious and important transportation route. We should look at and must look at ways to improve the traffic and the issues around the 401.

I know that during my time as mayor, we met a number of times with the Ministry of Transportation to talk about some of the issues we had with the 401 and the problems it was causing our riding, not to talk about the traffic but just talking about some of the issues: namely, the provisioning of emergency services on the highway and the damage caused by the traffic when it was diverted to our local roads, which aren't designed for heavy truck traffic.

1420

We were finding that the highways were closed for many hours—sometimes as many as 10 or 12 hours if there was a fatality on the highway—issues that never used to happen. Are we closing the highway too long? If you look at the amount of commercial traffic that's held up on the highways, or the people who are inconvenienced by sitting for hours on the highway or being diverted around their local roads, it really seems to be out of control.

When an accident occurs, many times they're called up by cellphone. It can be as simple as a car in a ditch in a snowstorm or it can be a serious accident. Our firefighters are called out. Mainly, once the emergency is put aside, the OPP use this for traffic diversion. The province doesn't want to recognize that as an approved use of our emergency services, so we're not compensated for that. We'll have seven or eight men out on the highway, and no time for that unless we do some emergency work.

In some jurisdictions along the highway, they are actually going over and cutting the battery cables during an incident when there is no damage done, just so they can claim there was a possible fire and their time is compensated. Clearly, we need to have some rules and some compensation requirements. If we require the OPP for traffic help, they should have proper equipment, proper training and be compensated for it.

In one incident we had on the highway, the fire truck was rear-ended. It was taken out of service for months. We had to get it replaced—no compensation from the government. Actually, there was some concern about why we were there. We were there to direct traffic with the OPP during a storm. If we don't go out, it could be a neighbour out there or it could be somebody from Toronto who needs help. The fire department believes that if they're called out, they have to show up, because they're not really sure what the problem is.

Sometimes, we have to really look at what we're doing here. When I talk about some of the diversions and the damage on the road—we had a newly finished road. It was a SuperBuild project, with a third, a third and a

third compensation. We put a bike path in place. Within six months of finishing the road—it's a township road, not a county road and not one of the emergency roads—the 401 traffic was diverted to it during the springtime. It created ruts in the road. There was about \$500,000 damage to the road. The emergency road was clearly identified on the opposite side of the 401. No compensation. The township was forced to cover that cost—clearly a provincial responsibility.

I know I just have a few minutes left, but the other issue I'd like to talk about is winter maintenance. I brought this up before, and I know the minister has commented that it might have been Mike Harris, but new contracts were issued in 2013 where the snowplows on the highway are almost 50%, almost half. We wonder why we're having the highway closed in the wintertime for five, six, 12 hours. It's because there's not enough snow equipment available to keep these 400-series highways clear.

I've made numerous trips from Ottawa in the wintertime. Many times, I won't see a plow on the road during a storm, and I'm on the highway for more than 45 minutes. With previous contracts, there were enough plows on the highway. In those 45 minutes, you could easily have 10 or 12 inches of snow.

Anyway, my time is up. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We now turn to the member from Thornhill. You have two minutes for a response.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank my colleagues the members from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Kitchener–Conestoga, Etobicoke Centre, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—that's the hard one—York–Simcoe and, of course, Timiskaming–Cochrane, who made a few very good points: that it's not just in the greater Toronto area where we're seeing highway accidents closing the highways, that it's not just typical gridlock.

Accidents happen. These are people. We're not at the stage yet where we have computers driving our cars, although we're getting awfully close to driverless vehicles in the future, and that may bring in a whole other host of problems. But hopefully, we'll see less dangerous accidents on our highways when they do come in.

As was mentioned, there aren't always alternative routes. There are closures on the highways, and it could be because of water, it could be because of rails or it could be just because of road design. Maybe we have to look at that. We have to look at where the exits are, where there are alternative routes. As the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane mentioned, the billboards should be placed with WiFi or using some kind of satellite 24 hours, seven days a week. Often these accidents are on long weekends or special holidays. It shouldn't be somebody working 9 to 5 and is off for the holidays who is in charge of these electronic billboards to tell people there's an accident up ahead, and to get off at this exit.

We can definitely do better. We all agree that the technology is there and we just don't seem to be taking

enough advantage of all the new software and technology. Maybe we have to look at special response teams that will come to the scene of accidents. There's a lot more to talk about. I want to thank everybody again for all their comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Milczyn assumes ballot item number 15 and Mr. Balkissoon assumes ballot item number 44.

VISITORS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I do have some introductions to bring to you and the House. I would like to welcome today in the gallery my father, Ted Kiwala; my daughters Linnaea and Helene Kiwala; and my EA, Raly Chakarova. I would also like to re-welcome the three Kingston city police officers who stayed an extra day in Toronto to support me in this afternoon's resolution: Sean Bambrick, Jason Cahill, Ron Lehenhorst.

Sorry for doing this again; I did some of these introductions this morning. We've got Katsitsiase Betty Maracle, Bear Clan, Mohawk Nation, Tyendingaga—I hope I pronounced that properly—Laurel Claus-Johnson, a Mohawk Bear Clan community grandmother, a former VP of the Ontario Native Women's Association and a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal; Bryan Bowers, a mixed settler with First Nations ancestry, is a board member of the First Nations Technical Institute in Tyendingaga Mohawk territory and a board member of the Naval Marine Archive in Picton—Bryan is a former member of the OPP and Kingston city police—Janis Hill of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen's University in Kingston and the Islands; Betty Carr-Braint from Tyendingaga, an elder in residence at Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen's; Dr. Dawn Lavell-Harvard, vice president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, from Peterborough, and also president of the Ontario Native Women's Association—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'm sorry, but I thought you had a very short point of order. If you want to do more introductions, I would ask that you do it as part of your speech. I recognized it because I just had a note saying, "I have a short point of order." I'd like to carry on. On the last bill we debated—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I very much respect that these people have come here to see the debate this afternoon, and that is great. I think the time to do that, as you pointed out, is to do it within the speeches, because if we allow this to happen, every member of this House will do similar things during private members' hours and government debates, and that is contrary to our standing orders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I respect your comments, member from Timmins–James Bay, but quite often members just send a little note and say, “I have a point of order,” and it’s very difficult for the Speaker to decide what that point of order is until I recognize the member. Everybody does it. So either we don’t do it at all or we—I’ll speak to the Speaker that we stand by the rules of the standing orders where nobody is allowed to do introductions at all on a point of order when it’s not necessary.

On the previous bill, we will take the vote at the end of private members’ public business.

1430

RYAN’S LAW (ENSURING ASTHMA
FRIENDLY SCHOOLS), 2014

LOI RYAN DE 2014 POUR ASSURER
LA CRÉATION D’ÉCOLES
ATTENTIVES À L’ASTHME

Mr. Yurek moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma / Projet de loi 20, Loi protégeant les élèves asthmatiques.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I’m glad to rise again today to discuss my private member’s bill, Ryan’s Law. A year ago this November, I introduced the bill for the first time. It had great debate, and it passed through second reading to committee.

Before I begin my debate, I’d just like to thank the people who have come down who have been supporting me throughout the past two years in getting this bill through and developing the proper legislation. They were very instrumental in getting this bill forward.

I’d like to thank the members of the Ontario Lung Association who are here with us today. Thank you for coming in. I would like to thank the Canadian Asthma Society, which has also been quite helpful, and Speaker Dave Levac, who has also been helpful behind the scenes, giving me some advice. I’d also like to thank Judy Legg, an aunt of Ryan who is here today.

In particular, I’d like to thank Ryan’s mom, who is here today: Sandra Gibbons. Sandra has shown great strength and courage and has become one of the strongest advocates I know for children with asthma. Her goal is to ensure that the tragedy that occurred in her family doesn’t occur again. Working with me, we will pass this legislation this year and ensure safety for our students throughout our school systems. Sandra, on behalf of the Legislature here, thank you for what you’re doing and thanks for coming down today.

I’d also like to take this opportunity just to give a shout-out, because I enjoy doing this. I think my daughter goes to one of the best schools in Ontario, and I’d just like to thank the teachers she has had through the years:

Mrs. Keogh, Mrs. L’Heureux, Mrs. Burgess, Mrs. Marcinkiewicz, and Mr. Austin, who taught me grade 8. That was kind of interesting, that my grade 8 teacher taught my daughter. This year she has Ms. Roy-Kaufman, who is doing an excellent job with Maggie. I’d also like to thank the school secretary, Mrs. Walt, who always seems to ensure that the school is actually running and efficient at all times, and of course the amazing principal, Mrs. Giampa, who I think has brought so much life and enthusiasm to her school, which makes it worthwhile for the kids to go every day.

We’re here dealing with Ryan’s Law. Ryan’s Law was brought about due to the tragic loss of Ryan Gibbons at his school. Two years ago this past October 9, Ryan was attending school when he underwent an asthmatic attack while out in the schoolyard. Unfortunately, Ryan was unable to reach his inhaler that was in the office of the school, and the emergency medical personnel who were on the scene were unable to revive Ryan.

Sandra and the lung association came and spoke to me about this tragedy that occurred. What had occurred, after doing research throughout the province, is that there are no standards of practice throughout Ontario where guidelines can be put in place to ensure that students with asthma have access to their medications. Some school boards and schools do an amazing job; other schools and school boards are quite inadequate. The glaring gap in the system surely shows, and we need to fix this problem. So Ryan’s Law came forward.

The basic points of Ryan’s Law, for the new members who are here:

“2(1) Every board shall establish and maintain an asthma policy in accordance with this section.

“(2) The asthma policy shall include the following:

“1. Strategies that reduce the risk of exposure to asthma triggers in classrooms and common school areas.

“2. A communication plan for the dissemination of information on asthma to parents, pupils and employees.

“3. Regular training on recognizing asthma symptoms and managing asthma exacerbations for all employees and others who are in direct contact with pupils on a regular basis.

“4. A requirement that every school principal develop an individual plan for each pupil who has asthma. In developing an individual plan, the principal shall take into consideration any recommendations made by the pupil’s health care provider.” A health care provider, as defined in this bill, is any health care professional working under their scope of practice.

“5. A requirement that every school principal inform employees and others who are in direct contact on a regular basis with a pupil who has asthma about the contents of the pupil’s individual plan.

“6. A requirement that every school principal ensure that, upon registration, parents, guardians and pupils shall be asked to supply information about asthma.

“7. A requirement that every school principal maintain a file of current treatment and other information for each pupil with asthma, including a copy of any notes and

instructions from the pupil's health care provider and a current emergency contact list."

Mr. Speaker—or Madam Speaker; you changed on me—the key part of this bill is to ensure that students have direct access to their asthma medication. Those who are 16 and under will have the permission of their parent or guardian to carry it on them. For those who are 16 and over, it's their choice. Of course, there will be detailed instructions at the office as to where the spare inhaler is kept, if it is at all—I recommend highly that spare inhalers be at the school—so that we can keep track of where the inhalers are.

A lot has been said about Ryan. You might think that's just the one story that has come forward, but I've had lots of stories come through my office. One story that came through during the campaign last year: the story of a 7-year-old girl who takes a bus to her school in my riding—a different school than where Ryan went. She, too, is not allowed to have her inhaler on her; it's in the principal's office. She experienced an asthmatic attack on the school bus, on the way to school. If she had been allowed to carry her inhaler, it would have been in her bag or in her pocket and she could have dealt with the asthmatic attack at that point. However, she had to endure the school bus ride to the school, get off the school bus, find a teacher, have that teacher go to the office and then open the door and get the asthmatic puffer. Thankfully, it wasn't a life-or-death situation—although waiting long enough during an asthma attack to get your medication can turn into a life-threatening situation.

So it's not just a one-off situation; it's occurring many times in my riding, and believe you me, I've received emails from each and every one of your ridings over the last year. It's happening in your ridings as well.

The other thing I've heard, which I thought I'd just bring up, is the reason why we need to increase the education about asthma in our school system. Far too often, I have heard of a child undergoing an asthmatic attack and having to go to the office and sit in a chair for five minutes just to make sure they weren't fooling around or didn't need their medication. To do that to a person suffering an asthmatic attack is horrendous. An understanding of the disease that the person has—to make them wait an extra five minutes is unheard of, and it needs to end. My bill will end that.

Speaker, I also launched a website, passryanslaw.com. I've had tremendous success in the month that it has been out there. I've had over 500 supporters—252 endorsements, 382 signatures—and that's just online. I have had thousands upon thousands of written petitions handed over to me. This bill has support across the province. I'm reaching out to the members of this Legislature to come forward and support the bill going further.

I would also like to just briefly touch upon one thing that was raised after question period today, and that's with regard to OPHEA, which received government funding last year to study all disease states and how they'd be working within our schools. My fear is that this bill might be put off in order to try to facilitate all the

disease states into one bill. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I think that would be a bad choice. There are numerous reasons. The first reason: You can't treat disease states the same; otherwise, doctors would have been doing this for years. Each disease state has its own set of goals to reach to attain different treatment methods. To make a one-size-fits-all blanket statement kind of copies what happened to poor Ryan. His medication was under a blanket statement that we treat all medications the same. You can't do that with disease states, and I would hope OPHEA would understand that going forward, and maybe they could release a statement in support of Ryan's Law, which I haven't seen. Perhaps they can move forward and focus on the other disease states.

The second item I would like to point out is that one in five children in our province has asthma. Twenty per cent of our children have asthma. This bill is going to improve the safety of 20% of our children at school. One out of every five children will be better protected at our schools and have access to their medication. Their disease will be understood. I think that's one of the main reasons to get this bill passed. If you look back at diabetes and epilepsy, you're looking at maybe 2% to 3% of the population. I'm not saying they're not worth it. I think we should have legislation to look after those students going forward, but this bill is ready to roll and protect 20% of our students in our system.

Hopefully, we'll get through second reading today and get it through committee and come back for third reading so that next September this bill will be law. Later on, down the road, if we add diabetes and epilepsy—if you want to put things together, let's work towards that, but why put off a bill that's going to protect 20% of our students for another year or two or three years? Who knows how long it's going to take to develop the other legislation? Why waste the time?

1440

I've just got a few minutes, and I'm going to read some of the endorsements that I received from my website, which I think are pretty good.

First off—and this is just reflective of my riding, but I would imagine it might reflect across your ridings—the county of Elgin sent me a letter this week:

"We understand that Bill 20, Ryan's Law, will have a second reading debate before the Ontario Legislative Assembly on Thursday, October 23, 2014. Elgin county council strongly supports this private member's bill, and at its county council meeting on October 21, it unanimously passed the following resolution: that Elgin county council supports private member's Bill 20, Ryan's Law (Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools)"—carried unanimously, signed by Warden David Marr.

I thank Elgin county. I imagine municipalities across this province would do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I have one glaring endorsement here that I'd also like to read into the record, from my website, passryanslaw.com, that I think speaks to the discussion that might come forward later today. It's from Howard. He notes:

“A policy that ensures the safest and most fulfilling experience possible for our children at school should be a foregone conclusion. That policy being consistently applied across the entire province is essential for those people who need to apply it and those who hope to benefit from it. An understanding that as science and we as people change, so too must these policies, regardless of how good we think they are when we put them in place, ensures that we can support the first two needs. Don’t wait for perfection in this bill; do the best we can and be prepared to revisit regularly. It will eventually apply to more than puffers, but it is a place to start. Do not let it get so complex that it takes forever to happen. Please get it done.”

I have plenty more of these to read, but I think that hits it right home.

Let’s get this bill done. Let’s do it today. Let’s get it through committee. Let it become law. Let’s protect our students.

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. I would just remind the members in the gallery that you’re here to observe and not participate in any cheering or comments.

Further debate.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to start off by congratulating the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for his hard work on this file. He has continued to go after this for a long time, and I certainly hope he gets to where he’d like to go.

I rise to speak to my colleague’s bill that will provide support and protection for those students who suffer from asthma. The bill will ensure that principals, teachers, administration and, hopefully, other students, will be aware of the student’s asthma and what triggers the attacks. Just being aware of why a student is reacting in a certain way will go a long way to ensuring that immediate measures are taken to help the student when they are in distress.

On a general level, requiring each educational facility to have an asthma policy, regularly updated, is a good first step. But having an individual action plan to ensure that each person in a school knows what to do when a student goes into a reaction should provide the immediate attention that will likely save their life. But that’s at the micro, very personal, individual level.

The bill also requires a board to have a general asthma policy. This policy will require the board to take measures to reduce the triggers for asthma. The issue, I believe, is something that the ministry should take a leading role in.

It could require that materials used in new and renovation construction are as free of asthma-causing properties as possible.

It could require that fields on school property are kept well-mowed and that mowing be done at the end of the school day.

It could require that all schools and educational facilities be perfume-free. That’s for everything from

personal scents to scented soaps, cleaning products and any other items on the property.

It could require that at least one window in every classroom be an opening window so that the classroom’s air could be easily cleared out and affect only that classroom.

These are general things that the ministry could require long before a student would need to fear entering an educational facility to find out if they will be reacting to something in the facility.

Once all those measures have been taken, then the individual student plan needs to be a priority for each school. Again, the bill requires a communication plan that will send information to every parent about the board’s and the school’s asthma plan. In this communication, items such as what cannot come to school with students, like scented items, would be very clearly set out. The board’s procurement policy would already have established scent-free products and would add general indicators for the asthma students at that school without the need to individually identify each one.

From that point, each classroom teacher will include in an individual health plan what the issues are for those students. At this point, all staff at the school must be made aware of the problems and what action is to be taken when a reaction occurs. Not only will the staff need to know, but the students in the classroom must be aware so that should a reaction occur when a teacher or staff is not immediately available, like in the schoolyard or somewhere else, the students know how to get started to help their classmate.

Although the bill would require principals to keep the medical information, I believe that the classroom teacher and any supply teacher must have the information available in the classroom so they can react accordingly.

Part of the teacher’s responsibility becomes how to make other students aware of the asthma, how to recognize an attack and how to ensure that they know what to do when it happens. But adding this responsibility to all of the other duties that teachers have piled on them is quite a burden. It’s not that they don’t want to provide the best support possible for asthmatic students, but why would we assume they do, or for that matter should, have the skills to ensure the correct information and action plan is in place? In the case of extreme medical conditions, it is really too much to expect a teacher will get every necessary detail right in a panic situation.

I believe that parents should take the responsibility to write up the student’s individual action plan, work on it with the teacher for age-appropriate wording and required action, and then present it to the principal, then students and staff. This way, it will provide the opportunity for the parents to be assured that the plan will best respond to their children’s needs and will provide the comfort for the teacher that everything necessary has been done and included. This may not be the best solution, but something along these lines when it comes to the individual plan should be put into place.

The issue around storage of the student's medication could be a concern, depending on the type of medication the student needs. Of course, the immediacy of access to the medication will need to be fully assessed before any plan can be implemented. If the parent is involved in all of this planning, then the best outcome can be easily achieved.

It is a significant responsibility for teachers, staff and other students to be required to administer what could be life-saving medication. One of the strategies that has been used in some Toronto elementary schools for students who use assistive devices is to have a team for each student. These teams are trained by the appropriate persons on how to assist the student to get out in case of an emergency. I envision a similar system that would be in place to help a student who is suffering from an asthmatic attack. If it is in the schoolyard, the student support team would be able to assist the student into the school and to the medicine storage place and even be able to help the student administer it. I'm not saying that this is an ideal solution, but we need to explore many different plans so that when a particular school has students with more than one type of asthma reaction, they have the necessary plans to get ready for it.

When this bill comes before the committee for deliberations, I'm sure that the advocates, parents and asthmatic students themselves will present their best plans and solutions to react to their needs. I expect that many of these will find their way into the regulations that will accompany this bill.

I commend my colleague on taking steps to help ensure that the safety of our children in school settings is done. It is an important duty for all MPPs to do their best to put in place the systems that will provide maximum protection for all children in Ontario. We in the NDP will be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'll be sharing the time with the member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to endeavour to follow through on one of my commitments that I made to the constituents in my beautiful riding of Cambridge. As a nurse with over 30 years' experience, including pediatrics, critical care and home care, I felt there should be more health professionals in the Legislature to be able to speak to and influence policies and legislation regarding health issues. Furthermore, as a mother who raised a child with severe lung disease, including asthma, I knew that perhaps I was uniquely placed to bring a health care perspective to debates such as this one regarding ensuring asthma-friendly schools, or Ryan's Law. It is a great privilege to be elected to do just that here today.

For the first 10 years of my nursing career, I was at the Hospital for Sick Children just down the road, on the infant medicine ward. At that time, asthma care was inconsistent across Ontario—I'm talking about the early 1980s—and from doctor to doctor. It was not as effective

as it could be and was a cause for a great number of pediatric admissions to hospital. Indeed, at peak times of the year, we not only reported the daily census on the ward, we also reported daily about how many patients were admitted with asthma to SickKids.

1450

Early in my nursing career, asthma and its prevention and treatment was a focus for many studies and much education across the medical field in trying to have a consistent, effective approach to asthma treatment for all Ontarians. I would guess that nurses graduating today would not recognize the medication regime commonly used to treat asthma in the 1980s. It has certainly advanced since then.

When I started working at SickKids, I learned quickly that, although asthma was becoming more prevalent among Ontario's children, complacency was dangerous. Children, in particular, could move rapidly from mild wheezing to a crisis that called for immediate intervention that sometimes included life-saving ventilation.

Speaker, my own son was one of these children. Rory's lung condition was more involved than just asthma, but his condition could change in a matter of minutes that required emergency treatment that included frequent inhalations of medication. It was a scary time for him and us, as parents. He spent many months in hospitals at a time. When he was discharged for a time, he would return to school.

Rory was taught at a very young age how to recognize an impending crisis with his breathing, learned how to administer his own medications and in what order and how to basically manage his disease. He had quite a rigid schedule of prescribed medications that he had to take to school. Due to his brittle condition, he was in control of his medication, starting in the very early grades, and the principals and the teachers at his school supported him, working together with us and his medical team to manage his own care. It was essential for him to do this, as he was often away from us at school or in hospital. It also gave him autonomy to manage his own disease and gave his family more confidence that he could avoid a crisis, or at least slow it down until he could seek urgent medical attention. Fortunately, due in large part to the excellent medical care that he received here in the province of Ontario, Rory now lives and works in Europe, and continues to manage his chronic lung condition very well.

Our government takes the health and welfare of all of our students very seriously. That is the reason why the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Education support the partnership of the public health school asthma program and our public health units. Because of these partnerships, asthma care has improved significantly in the past few years, resulting in more consistent medical treatment among asthma sufferers and fewer admissions to hospital.

Our partners the Ontario Lung Association and the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, or OPHEA, have developed a new guide, 7 Simple Steps to

Make Schools Asthma-Friendly, to help the principals and teachers recognize and respond to the needs of children with asthma. It was released on May 7, 2013. Under the Education Act, a principal is required “to give assiduous attention to the health and comfort of the pupils.” Ryan’s Law replicates Sabrina’s Law, from 2005. Similar bills have been tabled to address other health conditions.

Our government recognizes that it is not always practical to respond to each individual health concern with a separate piece of legislation. Some organizations, including OPHEA, have indicated that they would like to see a more comprehensive approach to the management of multiple medical conditions, and will be part of this very important conversation. This approach would be less onerous for school boards to actually implement.

We are exploring options to address an array of medical conditions through a coordinated and comprehensive strategy that will ensure that our children across the province of Ontario will be safely cared for, at home and in schools. Supporting this legislation that will strengthen our schools’ ability to respond quickly to students with urgent medical needs should be a collaborative effort by all members of this House. I thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for his hard work on this issue.

I look forward to ensuring that all members of this House collaborate to ensure that legislation that benefits these students and their schools is advanced in a timely manner.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Usually, I’m pleased to stand to speak to a bill in this Legislature, but it is with a certain sadness that I speak to a bill that is the outcome of a tragic event.

Let me first reach out to the family of Ryan Gibbons and extend my condolences. No parent should have to endure the pain of loss because of ill-conceived rules. It is a shock to me that the silos of red tape and bureaucratic isolation make this bill necessary.

It is obvious to me that anyone, children and adults, should have easy access to their prescribed medical devices or medicine. I know, for instance, that our Speaker has been a great advocate of health safety in the schools and, in 2005, introduced Sabrina’s Law, a bill that ensures all school boards have policies or procedures in place to address anaphylaxis in schools. I believe that Ryan’s Law has at least equal importance. It must pass in order to protect children and to potentially save children’s lives in Ontario.

According to the Lung Association, asthma affects as many as one in five children in Ontario, and there are about 100 deaths in Ontario each year from asthma. We need a consistent policy in place across Ontario so that all children who are affected by asthma will be able to access the medication they need in case of emergencies at schools.

Puffers need to be on the student, in their pocket. Ryan suffered an asthma attack in the schoolyard. He was not

in the classroom or the gym class. It was too far away to quickly access his inhaler. This should never have been the case. Asthma attacks can happen any time, any place, not necessarily just in the classroom or a schoolyard. Perhaps a child is walking to school or catching a bus. They should be able to access a puffer if they need to use it, regardless of time or place.

Children are taught how to properly use inhalers and should not need permission before administering an easy-to-use life-saving drug. I know, certainly, in my own family, children have grown to adulthood, but they have also had their puffer with them.

As elected members of this Legislature, we carry a great amount of influence, and we should use this influence to make positive changes. We have the power to create an environment consistent across this province where children are safe in schools and parents know they don’t have to worry about their children’s lives being in danger. School should be regarded as a safe haven for children, and we have the responsibility to make schools across Ontario safe places to learn.

I’m very pleased to be able to add my voice in support of this bill and urge all my colleagues in the Legislature to do the same today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To our guests, the Ontario Lung Association, and to our guests who are here for the next bill that’s going to be discussed: I just want to be very clear about what’s happening here today.

First of all, we have a majority government. A majority government gets its way; the opposition has its say. That’s the simple reality. The majority government can do anything they want. That’s the simple reality.

Today, we are listening to bills put forward by the opposition, and in particular, this one—remember, we’re talking about a bill where a child died. A child died. The member has brought it forward before. It has gone to committee, it has been amended, and it’s coming back here again. What is he asking for?

My son had asthma and was one of the one-in-five children who had asthma. He’s now adult and grew out of it. But we’re not asking for the government to look at the climate conditions, the environment, which of course we know has an input into asthma. We’re not asking them to monitor the air quality in our schools. What we are asking them—what the member is asking the government to do—is a very, very small thing: It’s to allow children to carry their medications with them into the classroom, and to ask the schools to have a policy to support children who have asthma.

This is very simple. It’s very, very small, and yet, year in and year out, members come back again to table this bill. I can tell you now: It’s going to pass, and I’m sure your bill will pass too. What will that mean? It won’t mean anything. It will mean nothing, unless this government actually puts weight behind this and actually does something about it.

1500

That's what we're talking about here, because we are elected members from our constituencies, and in this case we are talking about a child who has died. It's no small matter for the family. It's no small matter for all of those other families with children with asthma. We're not asking for a great deal here. The member is not asking for much—asking for a very small action on the part of a government that has been in power for 11 years. Eleven years. Should I repeat that? Eleven years.

What we're asking for from this government—we're not asking them to change the air quality. We're not asking them to do much. We're asking that they allow a little child to walk into their classroom with their medication that they can use to save their life, to prevent another death, and that the schools have policies to help that child.

This is why people give up on politics. This is why our electorate is so cynical about sending us here in the first place. They say, "Why should we bother going into the booth and checking off anything?" Because all we're asking are simple things. "We're sending members with a passion"—this is the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London's passion. "We ask for simple steps to be done, and we can't even get that. What's the point?"

I understand their cynicism. We met that cynicism at the door. We did—all of us. I recognize it, I acknowledge it, and I actually give it credence. I say, "I hear you; I understand," because when we can't get this simple action accomplished, there is a problem. There is a problem with the system. There is a problem with this government. It's not enough, I will say, to pass this bill today—which I think we will. That means nothing. What we need to see is some freaking action—"freaking" is a parliamentary word, Mr. Speaker—out of this government. That's what we need to see.

This poor member, God bless his cotton socks, who has gone through all of this to get to this point for a family who has lost a child—we're talking about a child's death here—can't get this government to act on a simple reality. This is pathetic. This is sad, and to every Liberal member over there: I will hold you accountable. I know it's your cabinet, I know all the decisions come out of the corner office, but it's you who put pressure on your cabinet. You need to put pressure on your cabinet to make sure this happens because this is not a lot to ask. This is not a lot to ask. This is the very minimum that could be asked.

I think it's very distressing. It's an actual condemnation of our process, and it's certainly a condemnation of this government. If we cannot not only pass it here, because that's just lip service—if by the end of this Liberal term, this is not in place, may the families of all those children, the one in five who have asthma, be knocking on your doors, telling you what they think. This is truly democracy at work, or not.

So I commend the member for going through—we've all been through this. We commend him for trying his hardest to make this happen. We ask the government to make it happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak about the proposed legislation from my colleague opposite. Let me begin my remark by acknowledging the family of Ryan Gibbons and your loss as well. I also want to thank my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London for his compassion on this issue. I think it's maybe the pharmacist in you coming out in your advocacy work to support the safety and health of all Ontarian children.

Let me begin my remarks wearing my multiple previous hats before I came to the Legislature. As a former trustee for the Toronto District School Board, as a former public health nurse for the city of Toronto and York region, and as a former chair of the health committee with the Toronto District School Board, I can tell you that this proposed bill has merits.

However, everybody in this House knows, as much as my colleague from Parkdale–High Park said that the Legislature has a role to play, blah-blah-blah, that every publicly funded school board has the ability to pass this law—a policy.

Let me share with you—I know I mustn't bring props, Mr. Speaker. Halton District School Board has an asthma protocol. As a former chair of the health committee, I got the Toronto District School Board to pass a type 1 diabetes protocol. It took three years to develop. It was the first school board in Canada with a type 1 diabetes protocol.

To say what the member opposite is saying, that we're waiting a lot of time, do we not wait until OPHEA do their great work with the government: There is a responsibility of the Thames Valley District School Board to have this policy passed. We know that. They have a responsibility.

Interjection.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, there should be no heckling. It's my turn to speak.

On October 27, there is an election. There is an election on Monday. There are leadership concerns. The school board has the ability to develop policies ensuring the health and safety of the students.

Collectively, what the Minister of Education is saying is that we need to look comprehensively. There are multiple chronic conditions that students in our classrooms have. We talked about Sabrina's Law, which we passed several years ago. We have students in our system with type 1 diabetes, epilepsy and other chronic conditions. They are in our classrooms, folks. There is FASD, that I know the member opposite talked about earlier. However, it is considered behavioural—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Ms. Soo Wong: At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker—*Interjection.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'd ask the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London to come to order.

Ms. Soo Wong: Let me share with the members in the House right now research done last year, a master's thesis by Nicola Thomas—I'm going to show it to her former colleague—"Asthma Management Practices in Two Ontario School Districts." What she found was very interesting. Despite the fact that, yes, there are very good pieces of the legislation—I think there are merits to it—in her study, "Almost 60% of administrators," meaning principals, "reported parents not identifying students with asthma...."

Furthermore, although parents have an obligation to notify the school of the child's condition, many don't. I know that the proposed legislation I am reading here—the member opposite said there's an obligation for parents to inform the school board.

Many of us come from very diverse communities, and many parents might not even know their child has asthma. Yes, there is an obligation to share medical information, but not every parent is prepared to disclose their child's health condition, or they might not even know that the child has the medical condition called asthma.

The other piece here is that I also want to remind the members opposite that there is, in the proposed legislation, the role and responsibility of employees. Any time you deal with employees—I want to know where this proposed legislation is talking about education and training. Furthermore, the collective agreement will come out. I can tell you that when we were drafting the proposed policy on type 1 diabetes with the Toronto District School Board, there were extensive negotiations with all the unions—not just the teachers' union, but also CUPE etc.—to make that we followed those collective agreements as well.

At the end of the day, while I appreciate the member opposite and his passion about this issue, the proposed legislation has to be considered, because asthma is not just a chronic condition. We have to talk about asthma education, and asthma control and management. That's where we need to work with the experts from the Hospital for Sick Children, the Lung Association, the Asthma Society of Canada and others, because at the end of the day, it's not just one-off. We need to look at it comprehensively, because we do know, unfortunately, many, many data that prove, that show, there are Canadians—young people in our classrooms—with asthma conditions. It's not just about the policy. We've got to make sure everybody knows the signs and symptoms of an asthma attack and how to prevent it, and do the education, because at the end of the day, we all want to make sure every child is safe in the classroom.

1510

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to rise today and stand in support of my colleague and my seatmate here, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, on Bill 20, better known as Ryan's Law (Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools).

My colleague spoke very passionately in his opening remarks about the bill being inspired by the loss of 12-

year-old Ryan Gibbons. Ryan's mom and some of his family are here today. I thank them for being here and staying involved and being persistent.

Ryan was the typical young boy. He loved keeping active, riding his bike and playing with his friends; his asthma didn't slow him down. But like many children, he suffered an asthma attack and, sadly, Ryan passed away.

Ryan's Law has a noble purpose, and it's to make all schools across the province asthma-friendly environments. It's something that each of us takes very seriously, and I'm pleased that the bill is reintroduced here today.

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt—and we were both nurses in our past lives, I say—has made some articulate comments on asthma, but I think you have to understand that asthma blocks your airways. It's an immediate need for treatment. You see young children today; they are very versed, especially when they have asthma. They know what an asthma attack is and how to use their puffers. She made some comments about other health diseases that some of our children do have in our schools. I have to say that each disease, each disorder, has to be treated differently. Asthma, as I have said—and as many nursing colleagues who may be the Legislature know, in Maslow's hierarchy of needs air is number one. You have to get air in the lungs to survive.

My colleague mentioned how many children do have asthma and are affected by asthma, and it's one in five, which is huge. It's a common chronic condition. An individual in Ontario has a 34% risk of developing asthma before they reach 80 years of age.

My colleague, again, was speaking of her past with the Toronto District School Board. The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London has made a great stand, to say that with the rest of the school boards not everybody's on the same page. There's a patchwork across the province. Children aren't protected. Is that not our goal as legislators, to put legislation in to protect children, to the best of our ability?

This piece of legislation makes total sense. I've just tried to explain plainly the fact that asthma is a condition that needs to be treated right away. Young children—I'm so amazed about how they have the knowledge of their puffers and how they can use them. It is location—where you are. In this case, Ryan was in the schoolyard. He was far away from his puffer—too far away—and we all know, sadly, what happened.

So putting a law in that requires every school board to establish and maintain an asthma policy, to educate the teachers, principals and vice-principals about the strategy—so no one has a fear if they have to come and help a child who has asthma. There are communication plans. No, it doesn't come overnight, but my colleague has brought this forward many times. There has been lots of discussion. We have here the Lung Association today, which has been involved—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I've been working with them.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Right. He's been working with them. How many years has this been going on? Two years?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Two years.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Two years now, so it's not like we just came out of the blue. This has been worked on with many school boards, with the Lung Association. There has to be some credence in what we're saying. Protecting children should be a priority. This is a priority bill that needs to be dealt with.

Just to prove even further, my colleague has started a website, passryanslaw.com, from which he read some of his comments today.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The members should go look at it.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, we do encourage the members from the government side to look at this, to see the difference that we can make.

This bill makes total sense to help the school boards, but most of all to protect our children; and that as legislators is what our primary task is. He's brought a very thoughtful and needed piece of legislation forward, and I hope he enjoys all-party support later in the day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's absolutely a pleasure and privilege to be here to support my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Jeff Yurek, a pharmacist by trade.

He brought this bill here, Ryan's Law—Bill 20 now—in November 2011. Due to his determination, he's now working with the Lung Association and continues to bring it. I just can't fathom why the Liberals would not expedite this, why they would not have brought it forward the first time he brought it and get it in so that every one of our children in our schools has the same ability to protect themselves and their health first and foremost.

I'd like to truly acknowledge the advocacy work of Ryan's mom, Sandra Gibbons, who is in the crowd today. To me, it's amazing that she would step up and show the bravery to bring this and to continue to try to support and move a law forward on the legacy of her son, whom she lost, so that other parents or children would never have to go through this.

In her words, "Unfortunately, I stand here today trying to get this bill—Ryan's Law—in place so that nobody else has to feel how I feel every day, and that's missing my son."

Speaker, I just can't fathom how we couldn't move this forward and get it into law as soon as we possibly can.

Again, kudos to the Lung Association. Obviously, we know that they're going to be standing behind this. Hopefully, we can move this forward with their help and get it to law as soon as we can.

In my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, one of my constituents, Mary Lynne Kennedy-McGregor, wrote: "Please put your full resources and support behind the passing of Bill 135. We cannot afford to have another death, another grieving family, when simple measures can be enacted to prevent another child from not being able to reach their life-saving medication in time. I hope that I can count on your support.

"Sincerely,

"Mary Lynne Kennedy-McGregor" from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Speaker, our whole reason for getting up in the morning, or certainly my whole reason for getting up in the morning, is about health care, for the most part, and all the other things we do, but health care—and something that, to me, is so simple: a law that's going to protect every child out there who happens to have asthma.

One of the colleagues across the floor said, "Well, you can do it." Obviously, other school boards haven't done it. There are very few in the province that actually have even thought of doing it. So this is one of those cases where the government should come in and try to move forward. If they're not prepared to step up, then this is something that I believe government has the ability to do and should be doing.

It's incumbent upon us to ensure our children have immediate access to quick-relief medicine in case of an asthma attack at school. Ryan's Law would do just that: no more patchwork quilt but an across-the-province law that would ensure that a student can carry their own asthma medication, a life-saving medication, with them at all times.

I cannot believe that there's any reason why any one of the 107 legislators that are in this House would not vote to expedite this and get it to become law as quickly as possible. If they do, I think they need to speak to a parent in their riding or in my riding and answer to them. They should speak with Ms. Gibbons very frankly and tell her why they would not stand in this House and support approval of this bill.

It's absolutely mind-boggling that we have something that, to me, is pretty simple to enact. We spend all kinds of time on other legislation that's never going to really be of benefit, at the end of the day, to all people when one like this is, and we don't move forward with it. We have an estimated 500,000 children, apparently, across Ontario who have asthma. How can we not do something that's going to help an estimated 500,000 of our greatest treasure, our children?

Again, I commend my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London. This is the second time he's brought it. Hopefully, it's the last time he's going to have to bring it.

Government: I implore you, Liberals, to bring to it forward to the House for the third and final reading. Get this vote done, get this into law and make our children the absolute priority of why we come here every day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London, you now have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I apologize for my outburst, but I am quite passionate on this topic, and when the member was speaking over there, she was quite wrong in basically everything she said.

However, I'd like to thank the members from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Cambridge, York–Simcoe; Parkdale–High Park—a very excellent speech; Scarborough–Agincourt, even though she was off base;

Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and of course, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The reasons thrown at me from the Liberal government as to why this bill is wrong actually emphasize my point of why we need this bill. The one member made a point that this government does not look at single-source disease states to treat in our schools too often. They wait and wait and wait.

She made mention that Sabrina's Law passed in 2005. We're in 2014, nine years later, and how many other disease states have they looked after in our school system? Zero. How many children have had to be rushed to hospital? Immense numbers. How many children died? Too many.

1520

Mr. Speaker, it speaks for itself. Now is the time to actually deal with an issue in our school system, instead of putting it off, and support this bill to come back.

I'd also like to give a little education to the members of the Legislature. Some have brought this forward like it would be an everyday event going on in the schools. Let me tell you: Most children with asthma are treated with a steroid inhaler, which is twice a day, morning and night, not at the school. So that puffer would never be at the school or have a reason to be. If the child is sick and needs it more often, they should stay home until they're feeling better. We're talking about the emergency reliever medication. Most children with asthma are controlled, which means they are going to have to use this asthma medication very rarely, if at all. In fact, if they use the medication more than once or twice a week, they're not in control and they need to go to the doctor with their asthma plan that's already there in order to amend their medications so that it's not going to be necessarily used every day.

We are asking for a Ventolin inhaler to be at the school in case of a life-and-death situation for our children at home, and you guys might be blocking this. Think about that when you're in your cabinet meeting going forward.

This bill can come back. We can save lives. Let's do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. I will take the vote at the end of private members' public business.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I move that, in the opinion of this House, Ontario supports the National Aboriginal Organizations' call on the federal government for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and severity of the issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to begin by recognizing the Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC, which was one of the first organizations to break the silence and shed light on the issue of disproportionate violence against aboriginal women and girls with the Sisters in Spirit project. NWAC gave faces and voices to the statistics, to the sisters, mothers, daughters, cousins and aunts whose lives were tragically cut short.

For the past month, I have displayed NWAC's faceless doll panels in my constituency office and travelled the Kingston community with them to help spread awareness about this issue. Every faceless doll is unique and was created to give a visual representation of each of the known cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada who have become faceless victims of crime.

My visits with representatives of the aboriginal community to school classrooms and organizations in Kingston and the Islands were emotionally overwhelming experiences. They brought me yet closer to imagining the lives of these beautiful women and inspired me to bring this motion forward.

One of these women was Nicole. Nicole was murdered in Winnipeg, in October 2003, at the age of 32. She left behind three beautiful children, aged nine, seven, and 16 months, to be looked after by their grandmother, a constituent of mine, who bravely shared her story at the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory Sisters in Spirit vigil this fall. Her story is one of far too many.

I know that the members of this House are well aware of this ongoing human rights issue in Canada. Today, I call on the members of the House to support my motion for a national public inquiry for three main reasons:

While violence against all women worldwide continues to be a grave concern that deserves our utmost attention, we must recognize the disproportionate representation of female aboriginal victims in Canada.

In Canada, the homicide rate is almost seven times higher for aboriginal women than for non-aboriginal women. In Canada, aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than non-aboriginal women. In Canada, aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-aboriginal women.

From 2005 to 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit initiative uncovered 582 cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls. In May of this year, the RCMP released their own report, which examined the issue across all police jurisdictions in Canada. The report found 1,181 police-reported incidents of aboriginal female homicides and missing aboriginal females between 1980 and 2012, more than double the initial NWAC findings.

The RCMP research shows that 16% of all female homicide victims are aboriginal, astonishing when one considers that aboriginal women represent only 4% of the national female population. The NWAC report showed us that just over half of these homicides involve women and girls under the age of 31; 17% are aged 18 years or younger, and 88% were mothers.

The second reason: This issue transcends communities, provincial borders and partisan lines. As such, we must address it as a nation. We have failed to close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians in health care, housing, education, employment and social services.

We sought to assimilate aboriginal peoples into our own image, to eliminate their individual identities and shame their cultures as inferior to ours, yet aboriginals remain strong, resilient and proud. A national inquiry will begin to rebuild Canada's international reputation in the realm of human rights.

In July of this year, a report of the United Nations' special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples examined the situation of indigenous peoples in Canada. The following is a quote from that report: "It is difficult to reconcile Canada's well-developed legal framework and general prosperity with the human rights problems faced by indigenous peoples in Canada, which have reached crisis proportions in many respects."

A national inquiry, such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the 2008 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, will help increase public awareness and understanding of the issue, and help to uncover the many underlying and systemic and social causes that make aboriginal women and girls more vulnerable to violent situations.

It is undeniable that factors such as the general impacts of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, institutional and individual racism and sexism, poverty, addiction, insecure housing and lack of economic opportunities are some of the underlying causes that increase aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence. However, a national inquiry would help determine the impact of each factor and identify how those factors produce or reinforce the economic, social and political marginalization of aboriginal women in Canada.

Third, a national inquiry will give voice to aboriginal families by providing an opportunity to share their public stories and learn from their experiences in a public forum. It will ask and answer difficult questions. It will gather data and provide independent analysis. Listening to the testimony of the families, the service and care agencies, the police and the input of advocacy groups will help to identify where mistakes were made and begin the discussion on the necessary long-term solutions.

1530

Revealing the underlying causes of aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence can also help raise public awareness and increase political will. Ultimately, it can result in meaningful action focused on providing resources that mitigate the circumstances that lead to violence against aboriginal women and girls. This approach will help uncover instances where aboriginal women were treated differently and identify the ways that we as a society have failed these women. It can help begin to break down the mistrust that exists between aboriginal communities and our public institutions. A national public inquiry will provide a degree of closure to

the families of the victims and will help facilitate healing and reconciliation.

It is time to prioritize aboriginal women's and girls' safety and address the underlying causes that increase their vulnerability and exposure to violence. Each one of us here as policy-makers has a responsibility to take action on this issue. Begin by taking action here today. It is imperative that we show solid leadership on this issue as a country.

I'm exceptionally pleased that we have invested \$2 million over two years to support the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women. This group includes five aboriginal organizations and 10 ministries.

No one has a monopoly on caring for their constituents. Since being in this House, I have always been so impressed with how all members from all parties care for their constituents. Joignez-vous à moi aujourd'hui et faites preuve de leadership en soutenant l'appel des Organisations nationales autochtones. Join me today and show leadership by supporting the National Aboriginal Organizations' call to our federal government for a meaningful and inclusive national public inquiry that seeks the counsel of aboriginal peoples and examines the underlying causes that increase aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence. It is plain and simply the right thing to do.

Meegwetch. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to rise today to this motion and provide a few comments.

First of all, we want to convey our understanding of the enormity of the problem. It's something that is certainly a dark mark on our society as a whole. I want to make sure that that is conveyed. But I also want to talk about looking beyond the request today, because I have some concerns.

One of them is the fact that there have been, I believe, 40 studies done in the last couple of decades and over 500 recommendations. My concern is that while this will bring greater attention to the issue, it worries me that we have 500 recommendations that are sitting and obviously not doing what they should be doing.

I also want to pay particular attention to the resolution where it talks about underlying causes and the severity of the issue. I have to tell you, on the severity of the issue, that there has been a discovery made immediately outside my riding, where there has been a suspicion that children were murdered. They have found, through radar ability, anomalies below ground. This is real. This is happening. This goes back several decades to a murder case, but it also demonstrates the problem that trying to find who the people were—they were quite young—so even the issue around "missing" is one that creates tremendous problems.

But I do think that we also have an obligation in this chamber to look at what the province has done, because the province has looked at those underlying causes and

the severity of the issue, I believe. If we look at the auditor's report in 2012, there's an entire section that has been done, particularly focused, on education. We all know that education is the key that opens the door to personal self-esteem, to economic opportunity. That's where so much effort has to go. But when you look at the document, there is some caution here as well, because it seems that there is a gap. With all the work that has been done, we still have some huge gaps to fill in order to be able to provide people with it.

So I would like to see today's discussion also include a commitment by the government to make sure that when the next auditor's report comes out, there is a demonstration of that gap being closed, there is a demonstration of being able to provide a better education system in the province, because I don't think there is a better testament that we could leave to the memory of those people than being able to demonstrate that this is what we have done in response, in our own province, with our own rules.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: As the NDP critic for both aboriginal affairs and women's issues, I'm glad we're speaking about the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women here today. Despite the fact that this issue is sombre, it is so very important to face this problem head on and move towards positive solutions.

I'll start by outlining some key facts. The RCMP reports that there are approximately 1,200 reported cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women over the past 30 years in this country. The RCMP study further indicates that aboriginal women are overrepresented among Canada's murdered and missing women, and that the rate of violence against aboriginal females is close to three times higher than that of non-aboriginal females.

It's important to keep in mind, when considering this issue, the fact that aboriginal communities are very diverse. Much like the rest of Canada, aboriginal communities vary from one community to the next. In my riding of Kenora-Rainy River alone, we have 49 First Nation communities and a number of different languages among them.

The aboriginal leaders I've spoken with recognize this issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women as one that will require the co-operation of all aboriginal people together with government leaders and police departments, including First Nation police forces, to properly address this issue.

We know the RCMP has already compiled very good information, and for years before that aboriginal organizations meticulously compiled this information. There's no disputing that these crimes are happening and we are pleased that the RCMP solves many of these cases. However, for the sake of reducing these numbers, simply looking at the crimes after the fact doesn't solve the problem of the issue happening in the first place, and that is: a high level of violence against aboriginal women and girls resulting in them turning up either murdered or missing.

1540

The most recent occurrence of a murdered aboriginal woman to hit the media is the horrific death of Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old girl who was found in the Red River in Winnipeg in August. An awareness campaign has surfaced online called "Am I Next?" to bring attention to the mounting number of aboriginal women either killed or who have disappeared.

Why is this happening? What can we do as a province for our aboriginal women in Ontario? These are the questions that need answers. The situation is not solving itself, and these answers can save lives. I'm glad that after years of agitating about something needing to happen, finally there is an emerging consensus that at least there is a problem.

There are all sorts of ideas out there about why we are dealing with this issue in Ontario. Some people claim that it's a systemic problem. Some say it's a societal or sociological problem. Some say it's purely a crime and police issue. Some claim the problem stems from the disconnect and cultural losses resulting from residential schools. Some have written that it's about valuing people, and that society and communities simply don't properly value these aboriginal women, firstly, to respect them and, secondly, to help them. Some say there is a problem of chronically underfunded women's shelters and crisis shelters across this province. Some say it has to do with these women being "at risk." Some speculate it has to do with poverty, homelessness, poor health or lack of access.

The result is that aboriginal women are too often the victim because perpetrators believe they are easy targets and that no one will come looking for them. As legislators, as people of this province, as police departments, as media and as people of all communities, including aboriginal communities, we all play a part in sending the message that someone is looking for them; that these women are valued, as all women and people should be valued; that they must be respected; that they must be free to live their lives, free to exercise their rights, free to be physically safe from harm, as the law states; and that all violence will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Our role in this province is to look out for all of our people. Let's be sure that we are taking action towards seeing a great reduction in these numbers of murdered and missing aboriginal women in Ontario. Let's get to the bottom of this and turn this around.

The Ontario and federal NDP believe that a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women needs to happen so that we can examine the full scope of this issue as only an inquiry can.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I rise today in the Legislature to support the motion put forward so eloquently by the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to violence against aboriginal women and girls in Canada, it's time for a

change. The fact is, the rate of violence against aboriginal women in our country is alarming. It's a daily occurrence. Too many First Nations women have died, are dying or will die because of this disturbing problem. The question is, how many aboriginal women will have to die before the federal government decides to do something?

The motion put forward by the member from Kingston and the Islands demanding that the federal government hold a national public inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls is the right thing to do.

The numbers are staggering. The RCMP reports police recorded incidents of aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing aboriginal women totalling 1,181 as of November 2013. In addition, aboriginal women are 2.5 times more likely to experience spousal abuse than non-aboriginal women, according to Stats Canada, and between 2001 and 2011, at least 8% of all murdered women aged 15 years old and older were aboriginal—double those in the regular Canadian population.

Think about it. What these numbers mean is that First Nations women in our country fear for their lives on a daily basis. More must be done to understand what is happening to these women. More must be done to give a voice to those who no longer have their own. More must be done to address this tragedy. It is unacceptable that so many aboriginal women—mothers, daughters, nieces, aunts—have to live their lives in fear.

The Ontario government recognizes that this is a serious and pervasive issue that touches not just the victims of violence, but their friends, neighbours and family. We, as a just society, need to do everything in our power to protect our most vulnerable citizens, and we are committed to working with provincial, territorial, federal and aboriginal partners to address and put an end to the unacceptably high rates of violence against First Nations women and girls.

In 2010, the provincial government, as you heard earlier, established the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women. The purpose of this initiative is to ensure that a long-term prevention strategy is in place to help reduce violence against aboriginal women and girls and their families.

We understand that there is more work to do and we will continue working until a just, equitable and safe standard is set. This government believes these are the sorts of steps that must be taken in order to deal with this pressing and disturbing issue. We must not shy away from our responsibility to provide security, opportunity and justice for all Ontarians, and that's especially true for our most vulnerable citizens.

That's why I'm lending my support to this motion. Ontario must continue supporting the national aboriginal association's call for the federal government to hold a national public inquiry on missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. We need a concerted response that is comprehensive, coordinated, well resourced and developed in close collaboration with aboriginal communities. Only then can we begin to repair the damage

that has tragically affected so many women and children throughout Canada.

So I'm happy to lend my support to the member from Kingston and the Islands, and I ask that this Legislature do the same. This is not just a problem for aboriginal communities. This is a problem for all communities and all Canadians. We have to put a stop to the senseless violence against aboriginal women.

I ask you today, are we ready to take care of our aboriginal women who are being brutalized, or turn a blind eye like our federal cousins?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion addressing the disturbing issues surrounding the disappearance of aboriginal women. As we've heard, the motion is calling for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and severity of the issue.

There is no doubt that the numbers and emerging stories we hear surrounding the occurrence of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada and in Ontario are startling and call out for action. That said, I think it's important to understand what has been done to answer that call, what is being done and what we can do to move forward.

I will say that it's always very easy to point to other levels of government, other jurisdictions, to call for action and demand accountability. But I do feel that when these issues are occurring in our own backyard, it's important, when we call for action, that we have a responsibility to understand fully the steps being taken as they impact issues here at home. And here at home, the issues cry out for action.

1550

I know we'll be hearing a lot about national statistics today, but just to give you some provincial perspective: According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, there are 70 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women here in Ontario. It's very sad to say, but almost all—90%—of these women were mothers. Those numbers are startling and completely disproportionate when compared with the general population.

Clearly, timely steps must be taken to reverse this trend and root out the underlying issues behind the numbers that reflect the realities tearing apart our aboriginal families. That's why the RCMP launched a national operational overview on missing and murdered aboriginal women, whose findings were released in May. The RCMP's findings provide important data about how the perpetrators of these heinous crimes abuse their victims. The RCMP found that 62% of homicides of aboriginal women were committed by a family member who had previously abused the victim, and 44% of those who murdered aboriginal women had consumed intoxicants prior to committing the crime. Again, those numbers are disproportionately higher when compared with non-aboriginal females.

That said, it's important to point out that nearly nine out of every 10 homicides were solved by police. That solve rate is the same whether the victim was an aboriginal female or a non-aboriginal female.

The RCMP study is one of some 40 studies already completed dealing with missing and murdered aboriginal women and has led the Harper government to commit an additional \$25 million to continue efforts to directly address the issue.

Given the destructive impact to our aboriginal families and communities, the federal government has also committed more than \$8 million towards supporting a national DNA-based missing persons index and new funding in 2013 for the Family Violence Prevention Program.

Just last year, Ottawa passed historic legislation giving aboriginal women on First Nations reserves the same matrimonial rights as all Canadians, including access to emergency protection orders in violent situations.

Again, the RCMP report was one of at least 40 studies, and rather than just continuing to study the issue, I feel it is important to understand the need to take concrete action and the steps that are currently being undertaken by our federal counterparts. For too long, the voices of victims have too often been ignored. Truly, they can be ignored no longer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We have a moral obligation as Canadians, but especially as the elected voices of Ontarians, to do the right thing and speak up to help others, and sometimes to speak for others. We must speak up, especially for those who are unable to speak for themselves because they have been taken or harmed or lost to us. There must be a federal public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

In Ottawa, New Democrats have led the fight for a national inquiry, and they have pushed to include the indispensable voices of indigenous and Métis women in the development of a national action plan to address violence against women. There is no acceptable excuse for ignoring the systemic barriers facing aboriginal communities. The federal government must not use the cost of an inquiry as their excuse for refusing to act. To even suggest that the cost of an inquiry could possibly compete with the cost to those communities is disgraceful.

This is not a new issue; this is not a new call for action. This is just a new official layer of support from across the country standing alongside First Nations groups, communities and families. For over a decade, voices have been calling attention to this horrible issue. It is a troubling commentary that such a real and awful issue of violence and harm has taken so long to build momentum and gain national attention.

The RCMP's May 2014 report on missing and murdered aboriginal women presented that "Aboriginal women are overrepresented among Canada's missing and murdered women." Canadians deserve to be safe and

protected. When we find that a group is disproportionately at risk, it must be a priority to investigate thoroughly. The RCMP report was an informative and necessary piece of this puzzle.

Factors that challenge communities and put families at risk of harm must be addressed. Those factors, however, must be addressed along with the root causes of harm. An inquiry is needed to confirm suspicions or challenge misconceptions, disprove assumptions and provide data from which to draw reliable conclusions with respect to risk factors contributing to women's disappearances and harm. We need evidence to allow authorities to make direct links from risk factors to solutions.

There are systemic issues that do disproportionately affect aboriginal communities. Addressing those issues will undoubtedly improve the lives of families and communities. However, addressing those issues alone does not guarantee that women and girls will be safe. It is not fair to assume, when it comes to safety. Women deserve to know that they will be safe. Women also deserve to know why they would not be safe.

As I said, this is not a new issue. Federal New Democrats have been bringing this to the fore for over a decade. MP Libby Davies first brought the idea to Parliament in 2001, Jack Layton publicly supported it in 2009 and Thomas Mulcair reaffirmed NDP support when elected as leader in 2012. Most recently, the federal NDP forced an emergency debate on a national inquiry this past September, and is committed to an inquiry within the first 100 days of an NDP mandate after the 2015 election, should they become government.

Major groups, including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Canadian Public Health Association, CUPE, OPSEU, NUPGE, teachers' federations and countless others from across the province and country have added their voices to the call for a national inquiry.

I stand in support as a Canadian, as a New Democrat and as a woman. I stand firmly in opposition to this epidemic of harm that is targeting indigenous women. I will use my voice because almost 1,200 women have lost their voices and can't. I stand in this Legislature adding my voice to the call for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal girls and women.

Thank you and meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Women's issues.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): —and women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker.

First, I want to acknowledge our wonderful member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing this very important motion to the House today, and I want to acknowledge all the special guests who are here to listen to the debate today. I particularly want to acknowledge Elder Lyla Kinoshameg and Dawn Harvard, president of the Ontario Native Women's Association, who were with me and many other people this week in Nova Scotia at

the National Aboriginal Women's Summit. Additionally, Dawn also acted as president of the Native Women's Association of Canada. So she had to play two roles, and she did a fantastic job at the conference. We're a little tired this morning, but we're all glad to be here for this motion.

As discussed, Speaker, of course the rate of violence against aboriginal women and girls is unacceptably high; I think we're all agreeing on that. That is why our Premier joined the Council of the Federation meeting in August of this year to urge the federal government to initiate a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Right now, though, the discussion is happening at the table of Premiers and provincial ministers, such as the conference I was just at, along with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It's happening at that level as opposed to at the Prime Minister's level.

When the current minister of status of women Canada was recently asked if she would listen to victims and families and agree to a national inquiry regarding missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, her parliamentary secretary simply ignored the question. In the same session, the minister was asked four separate times whether she would support a national action plan to end violence against women. Her parliamentary secretary sidestepped the question every single time it was asked. So my question is, where are the Ontario PCs on this? Given the comments I've heard so far, I think it's direct from PMO briefing today. That's all I'm hearing. All I can conclude is that they're fairly silent on this issue, and that's most unfortunate.

As I said, I was at the summit this week, and it was a fantastic summit. First Nation, Inuit and Métis women delegates from across Canada gathered today to discuss the themes of employment, equity and leadership for aboriginal women. Our working group in Ontario, which other members have referred to in the debate, had been directed to lead the development of a socio-economic action plan for aboriginal women and girls—sorry, there's a national one and a provincial working group. That is under way.

1600

The reality is that when I was there, with our wonderful colleagues who are here in the House with us today, I sensed a lot of agreement that this national inquiry should go ahead. That is the hope and expectation, that the federal government will step up to the plate. Having said that, there are many good initiatives, many commitments by Ontario and other provinces to respond to this issue of missing aboriginal girls, but we really need the federal government at the table. This week at the summit, I joined the delegates in the circle of hope, a ceremony to honour missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. I can't tell you, Speaker, how moving that was.

I'm so disappointed, again, to point out that the federal government sent no political representatives this week to the national aboriginal summit—no minister, no chief of staff, no one was there from the federal government.

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: No, it's true.

All I can surmise is that it's another example of the federal government's lack of commitment to aboriginal communities in this country. So I ask my colleagues across the floor: Where do they stand and can they persuade their federal counterparts to move on this?

On the other hand, here in Ontario, our government is committed to working with provincial, territorial and federal aboriginal partners to address and end the unacceptably high rates of violence against aboriginal women and girls in Canada. We, along with most provinces and territories, continue to support the National Aboriginal Organizations' call for the federal government to hold a national public inquiry on missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls; and to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and the severity of the issue.

As mentioned before, our budget invests \$2 million over two years to support our provincial joint working group on violence against aboriginal women. They're having a meeting next week, and I'm looking forward to joining them. They're looking at the priorities and the investments we need to make and to develop a long-term plan for ending violence against aboriginal women. This group, I want to highlight, includes five different aboriginal organizations and 10 different Ontario government ministries. I think that's fantastic. I believe it's the only jurisdiction in Ontario with this kind of formal collaborative process with provincial ministries and aboriginal organizations; although I think the other provinces will probably follow suit. I just sensed so much enthusiasm at the summit this week and I got a sense of the fabulous work that a number of provinces and territories are doing in this regard.

Again I would ask our PC colleagues: How will they answer for their federal counterparts? I think it's pretty silent. That's what I'm sort of reading at this point. There should be no more silence on this issue, Speaker, especially given what we've heard today; especially given that we know how serious an issue this is; especially given the recognition that we need to invest in our aboriginal communities and end violence against women.

Simply put, it's a national shame that the federal government is ignoring a call for a national public inquiry. As the minister responsible for women's issues in Ontario, I'm very pleased to support this motion today. It's very important. She's done a fabulous job. I look forward to the vote in a few minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to rise to debate today. I want to congratulate the new member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing this issue forward. I know it's your first private member's business. You put a lot of thought into what you want to bring to the floor of the assembly, and it often sets the tone for your legislative career. You must be very passionate about this issue, and I want to congratulate you for bringing it here today.

There are a number of concerns that many Canadians share on behalf of the aboriginal community, particularly when we take our places here in the assembly. I want to welcome them here today for their fight for this recognition and I applaud them for their determination. I think that's the best part about being a Canadian: that we can take issues that matter to us and bring them to the floor of an assembly or to a federal House of Parliament. I welcome you here today to do that.

My understanding, Speaker, is that we've had close to 40 reports, if not 40 reports, on this issue, which speaks to how important it is to Canadians, to federal parliamentarians and to the people of this province, particularly our aboriginal community. I understand, as well, that there are close to 500 recommendations, which I think ought to start being implemented, because this is a crisis in our country. It is something that requires action, and I join my voice to all of those members here to demand that action be taken.

I have a couple of minutes to speak to this issue, but I wanted to raise another issue that I think should be debated on the floor of the assembly. It's something that I've worked on in my own community that I think is at a crisis level here in the province of Ontario. While I have the opportunity, I want to talk about aboriginal youth suicide.

The Speaker is very much aware of the tragedy that occurred in my community with the young man who, I think, highlighted for all of us the need to start talking about suicide prevention for all Canadians. In particular, I notice—in the province of Ontario and, perhaps, in the rest of Canada, as well—that aboriginal suicide is quite high. I was startled to read some statistics from the children's advocate: Between 1986 and 2011, there were 341 suicides involving children, youth and adults between the ages of 10 and 30 in the Sioux Lookout First Nations region of northern Ontario.

During the time we were working in the city of Ottawa on trying to create a suicide prevention plan, we looked to the north, because they were dealing with an epidemic far greater than what we were experiencing in southern Ontario, and I think that that is critical.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: This is about aboriginal women murdered.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I really would expect the member opposite, who happens to be the women's issues critic, to allow me my time to speak about an issue and a crisis that is very important to me. I think I speak to the folks at home who are very concerned about the suicides that are taking place in Canada's north, particularly among young children.

It is further believed that, for every suicide amongst that age range, there are eight other attempted suicides. This is a crisis level, Speaker. We have seen it in communities across the province, but it is worse in these communities. For example, the aboriginal community of Pikangikum has been referenced as potentially having the highest suicide rate worldwide.

That's significant because that is in our province. We should be able to do something about it. We have talked

about this issue in the province before, but we can do, in my opinion, better.

So again, I speak directly to the member from Kingston and the Islands as I congratulate her for bringing forward this bill. I support it, and I encourage her to continue her efforts.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Oh, my goodness, pots and kettles. All I can say is that we have a Liberal Party who was in government federally—let us remind you—from 1993 to 2006. A number of First Nations women, aboriginal women, went missing or were murdered during that period of time. Did they have an inquiry? No. Now they're calling for an inquiry, now that they're in opposition in Ottawa.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Excuse me.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I had a very nice evening up until this point.

Interjection: That's not part of our contract, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I think everybody was given a chance to speak. Many of us paid attention, and I would ask us to continue that behaviour.

I turn to the member from Parkdale–High Park to continue speaking, and I expect the rest of you to listen.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue, here in the city of Toronto—when I was women's critic, I spoke up time and time again for victims' services—the largest service that actually goes where women are being attacked, goes to victims and helps them, the only one of its kind. Guess what? During the stay of this Liberal government, in the last 11 years, the funding per victim has been cut—let me tell you—from \$286 per victim to \$31 per victim today. That is the state of victims' services for women who are being assaulted in this province of Ontario.

There we have the pot. Here we have the kettle. Here we have—of course, I'm not going to defend; farthest from it—the Conservatives and their policies in Ottawa. I'm not going to defend them either. All I'm going to say is, for those who are listening, to those at home who are watching this: Look at your history. Look at your facts. Don't buy what either of these parties are selling you. For the first time, maybe stand up for yourselves—women, particularly. We cannot buy into the cynicism of political partisan rhetoric, which is what we're hearing today. We actually finally have to stand up for ourselves and say, "I don't buy them; I don't buy them. I'm going to stand with the victim. I'm going to stand with First Nations women." I think that's all women. We're going to demand justice no matter who's in power in Ottawa.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

There being none, I now turn to the member for Kingston and the Islands. You have two minutes for a reply.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to acknowledge the members from the opposition: MPP Munro from York–Simcoe, MPP Harris, and many thanks to MPP MacLeod from Nepean–Carleton. From the third party, I would like to acknowledge and thank: MPP Campbell from Kenora–Rainy River, MPP French from Oshawa and MPP DiNovo—thank you for your passion—from Parkdale–High Park. From the Liberal Party, I would like to acknowledge MPP Naidoo-Harris from Halton, Minister MacCharles, the minister responsible for women’s issues and the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and that’s that. I would like to thank all of my colleagues, seriously, for speaking to this issue.

An inquiry will provide support and a degree of closure to the families of victims and will facilitate healing and reconciliation. The Native Women’s Association of Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Premiers of all provinces and the Assembly of First Nations all support the call by the National Aboriginal Organizations for a national inquiry into this issue. As dedicated community builders and policy-makers, it’s our duty to add a voice of support to call on the federal government to begin a national public inquiry.

With me today, I carry a picture of Nicole, the aboriginal woman murdered in Winnipeg I spoke of earlier. Her mother shared a story with me: that after so many years, every time the phone rings, her first thought is that it may be the police letting her know that an arrest has been made. That one beautiful photograph of a life ended far too soon is only one among far too many.

Thank you. Please support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would just like to remind members, and I let it go because I didn’t want to interrupt your two minutes, but we only refer to members in the Legislature by their riding, not by names. It’s just a gentle reminder.

The time provided for private members’ public business has expired.

HIGHWAY INCIDENT
MANAGEMENT ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LA GESTION
DES INCIDENTS DE LA ROUTE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 4, standing in the name of Mrs. Martow.

Mrs. Martow moved second reading of Bill 30, An Act to require the establishment of an advisory committee to make recommendations to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for the improvement of highway incident management.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I defer to the member from Thornhill. Pursuant to standing orders, the bill may be referred to a standing committee.

Mrs. Gila Martow: General government, if it pleases the Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member requested that the bill be referred to general government. Does the House agree? Agreed.

RYAN’S LAW (ENSURING ASTHMA
FRIENDLY SCHOOLS), 2014

LOI RYAN DE 2014 POUR ASSURER
LA CRÉATION D’ÉCOLES
ATTENTIVES À L’ASTHME

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Yurek has moved second reading of Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): To the member.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: We’d like it to go to social policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

VIOLENCE AGAINST
ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Kiwala has moved private members’ notice of motion number 6. 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 to the motion, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1615 to 1620.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Kiwala has moved private member’s notice of motion number 6. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McDonnell, Jim
Anderson, Granville	Forster, Cindy	McGarry, Kathryn
Armstrong, Teresa J.	French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Arnott, Ted	Hoggarth, Ann	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Munro, Julia
Ballard, Chris	Jaczek, Helena	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Campbell, Sarah	Kwinter, Monte	Qadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Damerla, Dipika	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Delaney, Bob	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Dhillon, Vic	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter

Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Dunlop, Garfield

Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Martow, Gila
Matthews, Deborah

Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 50; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER WORKPLACES FOR A STRONGER ECONOMY ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU LIEU DE TRAVAIL AU SERVICE D'UNE ÉCONOMIE PLUS FORTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 21, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour / Projet de loi 18, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi et la main-d'œuvre.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I rise today to speak to Bill 18, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour.

Before I begin an examination of the bill itself, I'd like to just comment on the fact that this bill is really two in one. In the previous legislative session, there were two very separate bills, one that addressed the minimum wage issue, Bill 165, and another that addressed issues related to employment and labour, Bill 146.

Bill 18 combines these bills, which I'm not sure I'm comfortable with, as these are two distinct issues. I think it's important to understand that in a productive debate, you want a bill that addresses a specific issue rather than several. One of the reasons is that it cuts the time in half, as we should be giving equal consideration to both parts of the bill.

My colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has suggested an amendment to separate these two issues into separate bills so that we can focus our debates as opposed to having an omnibus bill that we are unable to give proper consideration. That being said, I will deal with both parts of the bill today in my remarks.

The first issue, then, is the question of minimum wage. The minimum wage was raised without any kind of rational basis this past June. The bill, then, sets out a predictable timetable for businesses for increasing the minimum wage. Originally, when the government consulted particularly with small business, the request was

with regard to predictability with the idea of every two years, not every one. The predictability, then, was to be based on this review that would be tied to inflation.

I think all of us can understand why a two-year span is preferable to one. Obviously, an annual increase causes the overall rate to increase at a faster pace than two years. The other is that the average of two years' inflation is likely to be a smaller amount. Annual increases, particularly in small businesses, become just that much more non-billable time, quite frankly, with the extra paperwork that goes with them. The effect of providing this to businesses, while it gave them the certainty of being tied to the CPI—the consumer price index—at the same time it is an annual thing. That is certainly a different kind of pressure for businesses. It will mean that the cost of doing business will increase at a faster rate, and that businesses will have less time to smooth out the financial adjustments that are required to be able to meet the changes.

Minimum wage is a very controversial issue because, as with so many things, it depends on whose shoes you're in. The danger is that an employer is faced with problems with regard to being able to afford this. Very often, people find themselves in the position that they either have to reduce hours or reduce jobs to meet this new hurdle. So it defeats the purpose of providing an opportunity for people, when in fact they may lose employment as opposed to having an increase.

1630

When we look at the population that we're looking at for minimum wage, there are different categories. The largest category is actually young people who go home. They are providing a service. They are getting the experience of their first job. They are gaining important work experience. Quite frankly, that's more important at this point than what their pay is.

Employers recognize that. I talked to an individual in my riding who has been a great source of employment for young people and has always made a place for them. But when the increases of minimum wage come along, he has to get out and sharpen his pencil, and I'll tell you why. He can hire, say, three students. It's their first job. They're going to require greater training and greater supervision, but it's good experience, and in a couple of years they'll be really good employees. But he's got a choice. If the minimum wage, just for example, is \$10 and he has three students for approximately \$30, he can have two adults for \$14 or \$15 who require no commensurate supervision, who take their job seriously, who get it done, who are more reliable, who don't come late, who don't forget their shift and things like that. For employers, there comes a point of really making a judgment call as to whether or not it serves their particular business to have those three young people or not.

So we have that group; and then a smaller but significant group are new immigrants, and they, of course, are looking for entry-level jobs. It may be to enhance their facility in English. It may be to get references and so

forth. Those two groups are people who are looking at entry-level jobs that have minimum wage.

The question of raising minimum wage is also something that is viewed by other sectors in the workforce; that is, the people who have contracts that set their wages at a certain percentage above minimum wage. It makes wage negotiations a really easy thing to do, because if you always have, let's say, 4% above minimum wage or 6%, or something like that, now you have a very strong bargaining position to be able to go in and say, "I need more money." Again, we come back to the business having to make that decision in terms of what they can afford and how many people they can afford. Those are very serious issues in the workplace.

It also means, obviously, that we have to deal with the fact that minimum wage jobs should be entry-level jobs, and that's really what the purpose is. It's to provide a baseline income for people entering the workforce. It is important to protect workers' rights and ensure that employees, especially those who have no prior work experience, are not being taken advantage of by employers. Jobs that offer minimum wage are meant, as I said, to be a starting-off point.

In some cases in Ontario, the minimum wage has become a career-long wage, and this is more common in Ontario than in any other province. I think it's important to note that. This should obviously not be the case and it speaks to the broader issue of just how high the minimum wage is or should be. Ontario is the only province since 2003 that has tripled the percentage of those in the workforce in minimum wage positions. That's very significant, that it's tripled the percentage. It now stands at almost 10% of our workforce making minimum wage, or over 500,000 people. Half a million people are making minimum wage, hundreds of thousands more people than when the Liberals came into office.

This brings me to another point. Here on this side of the House, we have been asking the government what they are doing to promote the increase of good jobs in this province. Just yesterday, the Premier said in the House during question period, "I actually believe that fiscal prudence and a strong economy are connected." Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have our answer here. Fiscal prudence? What fiscal prudence? No wonder we have such a weak economy and a shortage of good jobs, because the Liberal government, for over a decade, has dug us into a deeper economic hole than we've ever seen.

I think it's important to put this conversation about Bill 18 into that broader context of the economy, so I'm going to provide you with some statistics that I think are definitely earmarks for what we're looking at.

In 2009, the deficit was \$19.3 billion, and unemployment in this province was at 9%. The national rate of unemployment was 8.3%.

Now, there isn't a test at the end, so you don't have to remember these, but I do think it's important to see the trend when you look over the last few years.

If we jump to 2011, the deficit was \$13 billion and unemployment had dropped to 7.8%, but the national unemployment rate was 7.4%.

In 2012, the deficit was \$9.2 billion, the unemployment rate remained at 7.8% and the national unemployment rate was 7.2%.

In 2013, the deficit had gone back up to \$10.5 billion. Unemployment went to 7.5%. The national unemployment rate was 7.1%, the lowest of the period of time.

In 2014, we have a deficit of at least \$12.5 billion. We are not quite sure, because there are anticipated asset sales; we just don't know how many times they've been counted.

Not only has Ontario's economy been suffering because of this government's policies, but the government continues to make it difficult for businesses to run in this province, due to red tape and payroll taxes. I think that probably if I were to ask any of the small businesses in my riding, they would talk about red tape.

My favourite story is one where ministries can't agree on the rules. I have two businesses. One has a door, and one ministry says it swings this way; the other ministry says it swings the other way. I have another constituent trying to make a living who has the Ministry of Health, two different departments, and they can't agree on the level of chlorine that is appropriate.

Everywhere you go, you get that constant refrain: "Let us do our job. We can actually make money if you leave us alone, and we can move along, ahead with our business." They're not saying that because they cut corners on health or safety or anything like that. It's because it's a new set of rules at a pace that makes it very difficult for them to make any money and therefore pay taxes. People forget: Businesses have to make a profit. That's the only way that government survives.

1640

The other issue, of course, is the question of the tax burden. This minimum wage, of course, comes out of the pocket of the business, and so it is, in fact, the same thing as a payroll tax. The credit rating agencies like Moody's and Standard and Poor's know this—that the province of Ontario is going to have to eliminate the budget deficit. After several warnings, the agencies seem ready to downgrade Ontario. If Ontario's rating goes down, the deficit will grow even faster, because our borrowing costs will increase by at least one percentage point, which amounts to at least a \$500-million-a-year increase to the deficit. A higher government deficit equals a more fragile economy.

Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years, I have spoken with hundreds of small business owners and their representatives from affiliated associations, and I've heard the same types of stories over and over again. Most businesses, especially small businesses, have had to face dozens of regulations by a number of agencies, boards and commissions, which all have different rules and standards which sometimes conflict with each other. It takes hours and hours for businesses to deal with the agencies, boards and commissions, and the numerous job-killing regulations that they face.

In 2012, the Ontario Home Builders' Association, as an example, said there were 28 agencies, boards and

commissions that home builders have to deal with. That's a bit like having 28 bosses. Which one takes precedence over which? Think about the time it would take to deal with all of these, let alone deal with day-to-day business operations. Just dealing with regulations comes to be a full-time job.

Not only are businesses hit with red tape, they also have to worry about payroll taxes. The most recent tax that businesses have to figure out is the government's proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, which will add even more expenses in the future and reduce their bottom line; and jobs will surely be lost. This isn't my opinion; this is the sentiment of Ontario's small businesses and associations, including hundreds of local chambers across the province that have created a coalition to deal with this new proposed pension plan, the details of which we are eagerly awaiting.

Mr. Speaker, in order to have more jobs, we need a better economy. In order to have a better economy, we must make Ontario a good place to do business.

Yesterday, the Minister of Economic Development bragged about how well small businesses are doing in Ontario. Well, I'm not sure I can agree with him on this point. If Ontario's environment is so conducive to economic success and job creation, why have we had a higher unemployment rate than the rest of Canada for the last five years? And why do I hear from businesses and industries, almost on a daily basis, about how hard it is to do business in Ontario? These are hardly the comments you hear from people who are comfortable with government policies.

I know the Liberals like to pride themselves on their accomplishments, but the reality is that we live in a province where too many people rely on minimum wage. Minimum wage is meant to be a temporary measure, not a permanent, career-long wage. It is also a costly measure that promotes the hiring of fewer people.

The important thing here, as we look at this bill, is to look beyond the bill: What are the implications, and how does it benefit the people of Ontario? Keeping in mind that we have large segments of business that have left—Caterpillar, Heinz, Stelco—these are names that have always made a huge contribution to the employment in this province. We have to make sure that we can continue the tradition of excellence and move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to stand after the member for Dufferin–Caledon to make comments on the comments she made. She referenced the minimum wage and how the Conservative Party doesn't believe that we need an increase, that the minimum wage is something that is a minimum for a reason, and that companies and businesses should be able to pay more than the minimum. Unfortunately, we don't see that happening.

So we knew, as New Democrats, when it came to making recommendations for the budget around the minimum wage, that it was important to bring the minimum wage to \$12 an hour, not just \$11 an hour. We

knew that companies and small businesses would have difficulty with that. That's why we implemented tax credits to make sure we had a balance in our system, so that, yes, businesses could still afford to pay that wage and people had more money to spend back into those businesses to give us a stronger economy. That's one part of this bill that we were talking about—the minimum wage.

Something else I'd like to talk about is the temporary agencies. We know that our workforce working in temporary agencies are only making 40% of the actual wage that that job is producing. So the person who's working next to them is making 60% more doing the exact same job. I have a real problem with that, Speaker. Yes, there are supposed to be temp agencies, but we find that the temp agencies use people on a regular basis to fill those positions of temp agencies. I'm sure that across this province and across this floor, we've all heard the same stories from people who just can't get by, that the temp agencies are taking up 18% of our workforce, and it's something that we need to work on further.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to join the debate today and thank the member from York–Simcoe for her comments. Certainly when you get more than 100 politicians in a room, you're going to get a variety of comments, and I appreciate the comments that were made by the member. They're not comments I necessarily agree with, but I think she did her homework.

What this bill is really about—there's a number of things in here, but I think it's really about standing up for the people who do the work here in the province of Ontario. It means we're going to strengthen workplace protections for workers. It means we're also going to increase the fairness level for businesses that already play by the rules. Those businesses that do the right thing will now be able to compete on a more even playing field, and I think that's good for everybody. What it does is, it takes very important steps to ensure something that's very fundamental: that every Ontarian who works ends up with a paycheque they've earned. That doesn't seem to me to be very unreasonable.

It also proposes to protect the most vulnerable workers in our workforce from dangerous work situations. It builds on a lot of recommendations that came forward in this regard. We heard from the Law Commission of Ontario. We got advice from the United Way. We heard from poverty groups. We heard from a number of individuals who said that this was a good way to move forward. It shows, out of those positive conversations that we had, that we can move ahead in a meaningful way that's going to make a difference to people in the province of Ontario who really need our help.

It does some very practical things, too. It removes the \$10,000 cap. It allows workers more time to recover wages if they feel they've been treated unfairly by their employer. But what I think is really important is, we decided that in order to try and take the politics out of the

minimum wage, we would tie it to the CPI, which would mean it would move ahead in a predictable way for business. By passing this legislation, we allow that to happen.

I would ask the entire House to support Bill 18.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to comment on the member from—oh, my gosh, I forget—York—

Mrs. Julia Munro: Simcoe.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I was going to say York North; York–Simcoe.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know. The Speaker struggles, so do we sometimes. The ridings change—and still to come.

Today, we're talking about Bill 18, Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act, 2014, introduced by the Minister of Labour. Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Labour. It's the first time I've had an opportunity to say that to you in House.

We certainly have different opinions. As he says, when you get many members of a provincial Legislature in a room, politicians on this side do have different points of view. We have strong concerns and the member from York–Simcoe expressed them. We didn't disagree with the minimum wage increase when it was before Parliament before the election. We didn't disagree with that.

1650

There is a principle that you have to keep in mind here, though, and that's the balances of small businesses. Now, I know the minister mentioned that you want to stay competitive. It's pretty hard to stay competitive when the energy rates have more than tripled since the Liberal government has been in. That's been a huge burden that is not being dealt with. We are told by the present energy minister that the rates are still going to increase. That's a burden on small business. That's a non-competitive feature we have, and all our businesses struggle every day.

We also have to be careful: We don't want lots of people on minimum wage. Minimum wage jobs were for the introduction, for students, as the member has said. We want less minimum wage jobs and we want more well-paying jobs. That has not happened under this government.

Also, we've seen the number on minimum wage increase by hundreds of thousands. Our economy is poor. I have more people in poverty now than I had before the Liberal government took power. That's a sign. I don't make those things up; that's the reality. You see it in the statistics. So you have to be very careful when you bring in bills that say "Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy" when we don't think they're actually going to achieve that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the member from York–Simcoe for her comments on this bill. It's an important issue. I don't know that the bill in itself is that

important, because it really only makes very modest changes to a number of pieces of legislation, number one being the extended damages provision. In that particular situation, the six-month cap is removed and extended to two years, which is a good thing, and the \$10,000 cap is also removed. This will allow workers to, in fact, collect some back wages.

The problem is that there still are enforcement issues through the Employment Standards Act. I've talked about them many times in this Legislature: the thousands of people who never collect their overtime pay, their holiday pay, their vacation pay, sometimes even their straight hourly pay. We've seen big cuts to enforcement in employment standards over the past couple of years. We've seen a blitz that the minister, I think, reported on during some of this debate, where 57 employers had spot checks done and the results were really abysmal, with 42% of them having violations of the Employment Standards Act.

While the bill is attempting to make some little steps to improve some things, there are much larger issues, such as severance pay issues, here in this province, with businesses going under and employees being unable to actually collect it; the low cap that's actually on severance pay provincially; and the ability for people to collect under WEPP federally as well when businesses claim bankruptcy in the US instead of in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for York–Simcoe. You have two minutes for a response.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much. I particularly want to thank the Minister of Labour, the member for Hamilton Mountain, the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the member for Welland.

I appreciate the comments. I would just remind the minister that we did support the minimum wage, and much of the business of this bill is, again, something that our critic indicated some support for. But I think that, for the purposes of our discussion, one of the things that continues to haunt like a spectre, with regard to minimum wage in this province, is in terms of the number of people. I think it's quite frightening to think that we have three times the number of people on minimum wage in this province than in the rest of the country. Certainly, when you look at the national unemployment rate and the Ontario unemployment rate, those are, again, very unsettling numbers.

I think the challenge, then, is to be looking at how we go forward where there is an opportunity, where the kinds of profits that translate into employees and more business are exactly what this province needs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Associate Minister of Health.

Just one second. Before I recognize you, I have something to announce.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will

therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: No further debate, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

CHILD CARE MODERNIZATION ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES SERVICES DE GARDE D'ENFANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 22, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 10, An Act to enact the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, to repeal the Day Nurseries Act, to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, the Education Act and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 10, Loi édictant la Loi de 2014 sur la garde d'enfants et la petite enfance, abrogeant la Loi sur les garderies, modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les éducatrices et les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la Loi sur l'éducation et la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités et apportant des modifications corrélatives et connexes à d'autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Simcoe North had 44 minutes and 24 seconds remaining. The member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be sharing some time this afternoon when Ms. MacLeod comes back to finish off the 44 minutes. Okay?

First of all, I'm kind of disappointed. I sat the other day—Mr. Speaker, I wanted you to hear this. I sat the other day through probably the most painful speech in my life, listening to Minister Sandals and the parliamentary assistant deliver their leadoff, and they are not even here today to hear my speech. Like, come on. This is unbelievable. Do they not care any more about this bill—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Mississauga—Streetsville on a point of order.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, my esteemed colleague from Simcoe North knows that in the course of debate it is not parliamentary to refer to either the presence or the absence of a member. In fact, he referred to both the presence or non-presence of a minister and an assistant. I would ask the Speaker to enforce our accepted decorum.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I recognize the member's point of order. He's accurate, and I'll ask the member to please keep to the debate.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My apologies. I forgot all about that. I'm so sorry. I can't refer to the fact that the minister is not here? Oh, I'm sorry; my apologies. But I listened to her the other day. Talk about painful.

Anyhow, I wanted to pick up on a few areas here. The other day when we spoke, yesterday morning, was prior to the announcement of the Ombudsman on his report, and the report ended up being called—I hope this is not a prop; I know it's probably illegal. But it's called Careless about Child Care. Now I know why they wanted to jump out in front of the legislation, of Bill 10, because they knew this report was basically a condemnation of everything this government has done with education, with respect to child care, in the last 12 years. So they have had 12 years to fix the daycare system in the province of Ontario, and really and truly, they've done very little; in fact, it's basically a very, very negative position against the Ministry of Education.

So then all of a sudden in the debate we had the Minister of Education and the parliamentary assistant, and they both—he's not here either.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): This will be my last warning to you. You know the rules; you've been here a very long time.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I know. Sorry. I forgot again.
1700

But the fact of the matter was that they kept referring to the speedy passage of Bill 10: "We have to get this done quickly." They said that, of course, for the media, and they said it because they knew that that afternoon the Ombudsman report would come out, condemning the government. Then they turned around after the Ombudsman report came out. We've seen messages from the minister: They're working on so many recommendations. They've already implemented this; they've implemented that. Everything is wonderful. "Let's get this bill passed through the House."

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to be the critic for education and I've been working extremely hard in this portfolio, meeting with stakeholders from right across our province. I've met with a lot of stakeholders who absolutely detest this piece of legislation—absolutely detest it. It's a job killer and it does nothing for the public safety of the people we treasure the most: our children. That's the problem we have.

I'm going to do some reading here on some of the things that I wanted to point out in the Ombudsman's report. I want to make sure we're clear that the Ombudsman really didn't agree that the bill should pass in these next few weeks. He wants all these things implemented, of course, as quickly as possible.

I'll read a couple of things here. In his executive summary, section 12:

"As well, the ministry neglected to engage parents in the enforcement process, and tended to avoid them altogether." Imagine, these are the parents of the 350,000 kids that are impacted. They weren't engaged. "The ministry has not undertaken sufficient steps to educate

parents, caregivers or the public about the requirements of the Day Nurseries Act and the important health, safety and child welfare purposes underlying the legislation.” That was by André Marin, the Ombudsman of Ontario.

The next point he makes:

“The Ministry of Education is just one in a line of ministries to have had responsibility for administering the Day Nurseries Act. Since taking on this role, it has initiated improvements to its operational practices and policies, including development of a dedicated enforcement unit to respond to complaints about unlicensed daycare operators. However, the ministry’s efforts are too little, too late. In my opinion, its delayed, inconsistent and incomplete response to complaints and concerns relating to unlicensed child care providers is unreasonable and wrong under the Ombudsman Act.”

That’s just a few; I could go on. Just look how thick this book is on recommendations and concerns that the Ombudsman has had with the work of the Ministry of Education up to now.

What the Ministry of Education wants to do—here we did it, first of all, yesterday morning; they split our leadoff time. We’re at the end of the week now and I’m assuming they’re trying to speed this up.

What we’re asking, one of our key messages from our party and what we’re saying to our stakeholders across the province, is: Because it has taken 12 years to get to this stage—because we’ve had 12 years of this painful government—surely to God we can wait seven weeks and do the consultations across the province during the winter recess. Remember, we are back here the day after Family Day. I have letters here from people right across the province—from Lively, from Thunder Bay, from Newmarket, from Windsor, from Ottawa—right across the province. These are private daycare operators who are very, very disturbed about this legislation, and they want an opportunity to attend committee hearings on this particular issue.

I’m asking the minister, and I’m asking the parliamentary assistant and the Ministry of Education and particularly the Premier’s office, who controls it all, that we do want those things. We want those committee hearings in the winter months.

Second of all, we’ll start a petition right away. We’ll be reading that petition in the House here, and that petition will call for province-wide consultations and input on the committee hearings, which would be scheduled for some time, I hope, in the winter.

Why I bring that up is because there has been some consultation done on the bill up to this date, and I want to tell you the percentage of people; the minister brought this up as well. I believe it was a total of—anyhow, 69% of the participants in the community sessions were from child care agencies and 31% were parents. Nobody was notified from the private daycare operators of the province—nobody. Like I said, there are 300,000 children they look after. They were not consulted on this. So we can’t say for one second that there was a thorough consultation done on this particular bill.

As our party moves forward, we certainly want to make sure that our daycare providers are given a fair and ample opportunity to make good comments and positive comments, and of course our party wants to make a number of amendments to this particular bill when the opportunity comes up.

I want to carry on now, Mr. Speaker—I want to leave some time for Ms. MacLeod here—with the next stage. I’ve got so many speeches here, it’s not funny. Oh, here we go.

Okay. I left off the other day, and I only got 15 minutes in the other day. To briefly recap, should Bill 10 pass with this proposal to amend the number and age ratios of children that ICPs can care for, we can expect the following: Ontario families will lose access to approximately 140,000 daycare spots. Based on population data from StatsCan, the number of children under 24 months that require the care of ICPs in Ontario is approximately 212,500, and that’s using a conservative estimate of 50%. Adding providers’ own children into the equation results in an additional loss of approximately 63,000 spaces.

In addition, the introduction of full-day kindergarten and senior kindergarten leaves 70,000 ICPs to care for approximately 100,000 children between the ages of 24 and 42 to 48 months. That averages to 1.5 children per provider. At an average of three children or fewer in care, many providers will be forced to shut their doors, as their businesses will no longer be financially viable. This will, of course, lead to an even greater shortage of care.

This scenario doesn’t apply only to ICPs. The truth is that since the implementation of full-day kindergarten, even agencies are feeling the pinch. Fewer and fewer agency providers are able to fill their spaces due to the combination of the two-under-two restriction, inclusion of their own children and full-day kindergarten. Many are leaving agencies and becoming ICPs as a result of that. Parents will face a hike of 30% to 40% in daycare fees to make up the shortfall of income to providers.

There will be no improved oversight. Providers will lose an average of between \$12,000 to \$20,000 of family income per year due to the involuntary reduction of spaces, or by being coerced to work for a licensed agency. Providers who are required to shut their doors because their businesses are no longer financially viable will be facing an unemployment rate of 7.1%. Parents who are already struggling financially may choose to give up work, as the increase in daycare fees will negate their take-home pay. The majority of those who will be forced to reconsider working outside the home as a result of this bill, of course, will be women.

In short, rather than making child care in Ontario safe, affordable and accessible, Bill 10 will make child care in Ontario far less safe and accessible, and certainly more expensive. These ratio proposals are not only counter-productive to the health, safety and well-being of our children, but are also playing with the livelihoods of tens of thousands of families in this province.

If Bill 10 is intended to address this government’s stated concerns regarding the overall safety and lack of

oversight that exists for children in the care of ICPs, why does this government insist on addressing those concerns by reducing accessible and affordable child care by 140,000 spaces, rather than providing an individual licensing system that includes all home daycare providers? Instituting such a system would maintain the choices that parents demand, ensure that government-regulated health and safety standards are met, allow for inspections and eliminate the wait-list for subsidized care.

Why has the ministry tossed out the suggestion of a provincial registry or licensing on the opinion of a single consultant from an Ontario college who declared that it would be too expensive, or that it would “create a false sense of security for parents”? How does licensing individuals differ from licensing agencies?

The ministry also expressed concern about staff overload and caregivers going underground. Is this ministry interested in safety or budget? If there are concerns about providers going underground, we must absolutely question the bill’s proposed changes to the ratio and the number of children an ICP can care for. Given that this bill, if passed, will eliminate 140,000 daycare spaces in Ontario, there is no doubt that this bill will create an underground market. Not only will those underground daycares be impossible to oversee, social activities such as library, playgroup and park time will be eliminated, as the providers will not dare to take their children to public spaces.

1710

We urge this government to reconsider the proposed changes to the ratio and number of children that independent child care providers can care for, and that it provide a licensing system and a regulating system for all home daycare providers.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to actually give you some examples of some of the letters that have come into me. I have a pile of them here right now, and there’s probably five times as many more in my office. I’d also ask, if any of the government members or the third party members want to have an opportunity to read these letters or they want to maybe use them in some of their debate, fine. Of course, I’ll spread them to my own caucus members as well.

There are three or four that are just absolutely unbelievable to think that we’re going to rush through a bill like this. Here’s one example—and these have all come in just this week, since they found out the government was moving forward with Bill 10 and they want to—probably they’ll end up time-allocating the bloody thing.

“Bill 10 is of great concern to me a home daycare provider. The numbers are just incomprehensible! When parents are looking for care for their child it is highly probable that the child is under the age of two years. Maternity leave is for 12 months. If the numbers are passed as proposed there will be a crisis in daycare.

“The town I live in has two centres. The rest of care is provided by loving, smart home care providers like myself. We had 1,000-plus babies born in our community last year. Where does our government propose that these

children go? I can guarantee you that there are not that many infant spots in the two centres.

“To add my school-aged child into the numbers is also ridiculous! She is four. She is in school all day. Why should a school-aged child take away from my numbers?”

“Having two under two is also not possible. It is so much easier to plan a program for kids the same age. It is safer. I can make sure that my daycare space has appropriate toys with pieces not too small. Again, with so many babies in our town this ratio would mean I would have to shut down. I cannot run a business and pay my bills with only three paying kids in my care.

“This would mean my daycare families would be scrambling to find care in a town there is already a shortage of care. I would be scrambling to find a job and care for my kids.

“It is a horribly short-sighted bill that really needs to be thrown out.” The more I see the bill, I completely agree with this lady. “Reducing our numbers as responsible care providers is not the answer.

“Insist providers have their CPR/first aid. Insist they have a police check. But to reduce the numbers and put an age on them” is “not going to solve any problems. If someone is a bad provider, it is not going to matter if they have five kids or one kid.

“I am just one of many.”

That is signed. I’m not going to mention her name, but it’s a daycare provider.

I want to also point out a couple of others here. This is coming from Deb’s Home Childcare in—I’m not sure where the exact location is. But anyhow, Deb has written in her note here:

“As you are preparing for today’s opening speech ...

“I want to point out that 80% of families have chosen their independent child care provider not out of desperation or lack of available providers who work for an agency. They have chosen to place their children in our care after visiting several centres, agency homes or other independent provider homes and finding the best match for their parenting and child care needs. The 80% speaks volumes. Parents want choice and they want the best for their child. Agencies have struggled for years to maintain clients and employees and I believe they have billions of dollars to gain from further restricting our client base and opening up theirs. Instead of evening the playing field they are doing their best to make it to their advantage. Not for the safety of the children as they claim but to line their pockets. If the figures that are being reported are correct and they gained only 50% of the 823,000 children in ‘informal care arrangements’ they would see \$1,604,850,000 in revenue per year from these clients. And at the cost of over \$1 billion to business owners like myself. I arrive at the figure based on what parents in London, Ontario, pay: \$43 per day to place their child in an agency provider’s home and providers themselves are paid \$28 per day in compensation. Multiply that \$15 by five days a week equals \$75 per child/week. Times 52 weeks is \$3,900/year. Times a conservative 50% of the 823,500 children in unregulated care arrangements.

"It is obvious to me that someone is pushing this through for profit and not for the safety of our children. Adding additional spaces for agency providers and waiving the very safety rules they are implementing with the clause that they can further reduce these age restrictions in the future only tells me that they are looking at profit for their business and not safety.

"Ontario needs to look closer at other provinces' registration and licensing systems as working for an agency is not the answer for Ontario home child care providers, parents or the children who require care.

"Thank you again for speaking on our behalf." That's another one, Mr. Speaker.

I have one more, and then I want to make some summary comments before I turn it over to Ms. MacLeod.

"I am an independent daycare provider and a mother of three young children. I have concerns over the proposed daycare modernization act also known as Bill 10. Since September 2007 I have provided a safe, loving and educational daycare program to children between the ages of 10 months and 9 years old in Old Ottawa East and in Alta Vista. When I first started my daycare my own two older children were 6 months and 27 months. Two and a half years later I had my third child. The proposed changes would mean that I would have never been able to financially open up my doors as I would have been able to only look after two other daycare children. I contribute the huge amount of compassion and love that all three of my children have for little ones to them growing up in a daycare setting. I have always loved working with children; however, it was a close friend who approached me for daycare while I was on an unpaid maternity leave that ultimately started my daycare. From there a community of families and friends has grown as my daycare families have become more than that; they have become an extension of my family.

"There must be oversight in home daycare to ensure compliance and safety; however, the proposed changes are going to be drastic to child care accessibility in Ontario. Many home daycares like my own would lose spaces, many would have to close, others would never open in the first place. The Coalition of Independent Child Care Providers of Ontario is suggesting that as many as 140,000 spaces may be lost due to this bill, representing approximately 40% of the children currently in independent child care providers' care across the province.

"Bill 10 proposes that independent child care providers such as myself become affiliated with child care agencies which would be a significant portion of our take-home pay for no benefit. The agency promises to provide middleman services and places people in my care when in fact I attract all my clients through word of mouth and have no need for placement service. The estimated cost to my business run under an agency as proposed through Bill 10 is up to \$10 per child per day representing \$300 per week or a grand total of \$15,600 per year with the new proposal of six daycare children in my care. Under the proposed rules I would have to count

my four-year-old son who is only home for two hours at the end of the day. I would have to put him in someone else's care at the end of the day so that a full-day spot would not disappear.

"This is absurd! Let the independent daycare providers become licensed for a reasonable fee and have unscheduled inspections plus mandatory first aid/CPR training to improve upon the safety within daycares. The current DNA already has provisions for maximum numbers allowable in a home daycare which I have always abided by.

"At the end of the day I love my job! I hope to continue for many more years to come, providing I can financially afford to do so. Please make changes to this bill so that the ... excellent, loving home independent daycare providers can continue to be successful and daycare spots will not disappear in Ontario." That's signed by a lady from the city of Ottawa.

What I'm getting at here is, you can see that there is much opposition to this bill from people who have never been consulted on the bill. Now, what does that sound like? Do you remember something else in the last couple of years? The Ontario College of Trades—same thing. The tradesmen of Ontario were not consulted. The people who are behind the Working Families Coalition—that's who was consulted, not the tradespeople of Ontario. Now they're paying the price, and I can tell you, it's bothersome the minute I hear the Premier say, "Based on the success of our first year of the College of Trades, I will do a review of it." Talk about an oxymoron. Really, the College of Trades has been a disaster and you're going down the same road here with this bill.

I'm going to repeat again before I turn it over to—are you ready to go, Ms. MacLeod?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm ready whenever you are.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay. I see you talking.

What I'm getting at, Mr. Speaker, is, we are prepared to fight hard for the independent daycare providers in Ontario. At the end of the day, they have the government—some of them can be like trained seals and vote on everything, or some of them can stick up for the actual people that they represent in the province of Ontario.

One of the things, Mr. Speaker, I've asked over and over again and will continue to ask in questions and will continue to ask in this debate is to have open and transparent committee hearings when it does go to committee in the winter recess. We will work diligently with you. We will do the very best to make sure we get the very best bill here.

1720

Remember, these are our children. They are the most prized possessions we have. Our children, our grandchildren—everyone here who has children or grandchildren knows how valuable they are to us. We don't want anybody not in good daycare if they require it. But we want the daycare to be fair, and transparent. We want all daycare providers to have a fair shot at doing their job and earning a living. We don't want to eliminate 140,000 daycare spaces. That's what this bill will do if we carry it through.

I don't expect the minister—in her answers to Ms. MacLeod in the last couple of days, I'm not even sure she knew what we were talking about. But I can tell you, we will continue this battle, and we will continue this battle on behalf of all those little babies and all those young men and women who have children who want to have proper daycare service in the province of Ontario.

Thank you very much. With that, I would like to turn it over to Ms. MacLeod.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Before we carry on, I will just remind members again: We're not supposed to use names.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. It is my pleasure to join in the debate today on Bill 10, something that is going to impact my fast-growing community of Nepean–Carleton but also communities across this wonderful province, in particular those who require child care.

You will see, in fast-growing areas and in rural communities, that Bill 10 will be absolutely catastrophic as we move toward, in the province of Ontario, affirming Bill 10, which will cause this province to lose 140,000 accessible and affordable daycare spaces.

At a time when we actually have a crisis in child care and it's very difficult for many people around the province not only to find suitable child care but affordable child care—I don't believe that this is the time for the government to be eliminating 140,000 spaces.

In fact, what I think is that the government should heed the caution from child care providers and daycare operators across the province, including those who operate Montessori schools, those who are part of Jewish day schools—my colleague from Thornhill is with me today; this is an issue that's come up when I visited her riding—as well as independent religious schools in southwestern Ontario. This is an issue that could actually put a number of licensed daycare operators out of business, according to the association of daycare operators.

Speaker, when I first was elected here nine years ago, I was the children and youth critic. We talked a lot about daycare at that point in time, about child care. I became an advocate. As you will recall, from the time I arrived here I had a small little baby. She is now nine years old. It coincides with my time in this assembly, ironically. I can tell you, speaking first-hand, the issues that I've had with child care myself. You will remember I was an advocate for making the Legislature more family-friendly. To those new members who have arrived in 2011 or 2014, this Legislature used to sit until midnight, and if not till then, till 9 o'clock at night. I had encouraged this assembly to be more family-friendly. So this is from the point of view of where I'm coming from.

There are several flaws with Bill 10, and that's why I urge caution with the government. In fact, if they're going to proceed with the bill, I suggest two things: One is that they adequately travel throughout this province in order to hear from parents and daycare operators as well as independent schools; and secondly, to be open to

amendments that will ensure that we do not lose daycare spaces or child care spaces in the province, which will only create further crisis in Ontario. That to me is something that is very important.

I think too, what concerns me, and I think we have to have a very honest conversation in this assembly about this: Is the Liberal government prepared to take away parental choice and parental responsibility? Because that's what I hear when I hear about this.

I met with, as I've said several times, many child care operators throughout the entire province, in particular in my city of Ottawa—whether it's the Coalition of Independent Child Care Providers, whether it is the Montessori schools or the association of daycare providers—with a great deal of concern here. In fact, it was just the association of daycare providers yesterday—licensed daycares, independent daycares—who actually urged caution on proceeding with Bill 10.

There is nothing wrong with trying to address problems, particularly when it becomes a safety concern, and I would urge the government to look at many of the Ombudsman's recommendations into making sure that there is more cohesion between and among different government agencies, between and among different government departments. It's very clear, according to the Ombudsman, that there was a lack of safeguards and utter failure in not only communication but investigation by the Liberal government in the Ministry of Education during a couple of instances. I would urge them to look at this and speak to all of the stakeholders in order to get this right.

From those I speak to, they are not opposed to greater oversight or a greater regulatory environment; in fact, I think you'll see that most professionals and most people who want to do well in their small business want to ensure that they are the best. What concerns me about this, in addition to losing 140,000 child care spaces, is the fact that we may end up seeing more underground operations that are not meeting even the basic regulations that the government has laid out. In addition to this, what concerns me is that some of the challenges that we have faced in the independent child care sector have largely been because the government or the ministry didn't follow through or follow up with complaints that were made by parents. That deeply concerns me.

At the present moment, the Ombudsman suggests that there are over 800,000 children in independent care, in unlicensed care, in the province of Ontario, and what I would suggest is for the government to embrace these child care providers, bring them into the process, make them feel like they are part of the solution rather than part of the problem, because many of those folks out there are working hard on behalf of many in the community—parents like myself, for example—who choose care close to home by people that they know and that they trust. There is, as I said, an element of parental responsibility and parental choice.

At the very early stages of the debate on full-day learning, which a lot of members in this assembly were

not present for because they had not been elected at the time, I was one of those voices. My daughter was actually among the first to go through full-day learning, and I had highlighted some of the challenges we would expect. Not unexpectedly, my daughter did have some challenges at that point in time in embracing a full day of learning at a very young age. Many parents and even some teachers have talked to me, and I had, Speaker, as you will recall, a great deal of experience as the education critic for the official opposition, so I would have spoken to many of the stakeholders during that period of time.

If the government is wanting to get into the baby-sitting business and they want to create a bureaucracy, I would strongly urge against that. I think we should encourage parental choice, parental responsibility and entrepreneurship, and I think that there is an opportunity for us to do that.

What worries me about Bill 10 is that it will prohibit the operation of a child care centre and a child care agency without a permit. It prohibits certain people from providing care, based on past conduct, and I think that's probably a fair assessment, and that's where there is some merit in some elements of this. But, above and beyond, I think it really will be very difficult for high-quality care to be embraced in Ontario, and it seems as if the government wants to move to an agency model which is run by them in the province of Ontario. Therefore, I think they must be honest in this debate about how they expect to replace the 140,000 child care spaces that will be lost. That is a fair question by the official opposition, it is a fair question by independent child care providers, and it is a fair question by independent religious schools.

It is a fair question for parents across the province, because they want to choose where their child goes for care. They also want to be part of the decision-making process, which is why the other day in question period—I believe it was on Monday—I asked the minister why she thinks she's more suitable in choosing my child's care than me. These are discussions my husband and I should have. In fact, regardless of what people's family situation at home is, the parent or the person responsible for a child should have a part of that decision-making. I don't think that's unreasonable, Speaker. In fact, I think you would probably agree with me that you should have a hand in raising your child. That's not the government's job. Parents should be responsible. They should have choice.

1730

I remember recently visiting Cambridge with a friend of mine, Barbara Bierman; this was a big issue for her. I mentioned to you that I had recently been in Thornhill with my colleague from Thornhill, and I spoke with some rabbis there who spoke to me about this. I know tomorrow I'll be back in Ottawa and speaking to some independent child care operators. Coincidentally, Speaker, I have a Montessori beside my constituency office, and I've spoken with them as well in the past.

So this is not even a new issue. I think it has been widely recognized that the government was going to

pursue this type of legislation to prohibit independent child care across the province, whether it was unlicensed or licensed.

The government likes to talk about everything being illegal, but at the end of the day, if there are complaints and the government is ignoring them, whether something is licensed or not is a moot point because the government isn't following through on what their fundamental responsibilities are. The Ombudsman himself said just yesterday, on the 22nd, that the ministry failed in its obligations. In fact, I'll just talk a little bit about that.

He said there are some 823,000 children of school age in unlicensed daycares across the province.

"As lax as the rules are for unlicensed daycares, they were barely being enforced by a bureaucracy that shied away from inspections and investigations and preferred to use soft tools of encouragement instead."

"This isn't just about an old law that doesn't work; it's about a government that has put kids at risk through years of bad administration and neglect."

Those are words from the Ombudsman. He is the one who suggested that the failures of the past—the reason we need to bring in greater safeguards is the result of failure. So you're now asking this Liberal government to take on more responsibility for the care of our children while eliminating 140,000 child care spaces, yet for the past decade, "[I]t's about a government that has put kids at risk through years of bad administration and neglect," in the words of the Ombudsman."

The enforcement unit is how the ministry is trying to deal with its enforcement and inspection issues, but this is where the problems were in the beginning. So we're now to trust the unit that has failed.

The Ombudsman is not recommending that all daycares be licensed, either, Speaker. He does not want complete licensing, but he has suggested that we need a central registry for unlicensed daycares and to enhance and toughen up the standards. In fact, I would say that anybody who has an unlicensed daycare, that is actually serious about operating a child care facility in their home—or a Jewish day school or a Christian or whatever religious school or any Montessori—would welcome tougher standards. Who among us disagrees with keeping our children safe? Who among us disagrees with parental choice? Who among us disagrees with having responsibility for parents and child care operators? None of us do.

But I'll tell you something, Speaker: This bill will take away parental responsibility. It will take away parental choice. In doing so, it will also eliminate 140,000 child care spaces that are accessible and affordable in communities across this province, but in particular in rural and suburban communities, particularly in those fast-growing areas where you see a lot of mothers open up child care spots in their community.

I know two, for example. Karen Fromm is a friend of mine. She had operated an in-home child care. She's one of the most caring and compassionate people I know.

Kim Sheldrick is another person who operated an in-home child care facility in a rural area, an underserved area. She's probably one of the greatest community volunteers I've ever met. But under this legislation, the government presumes that these two fine, upstanding citizens, one of whom is running for council in the city of Ottawa, are unworthy to not only look after their own children but others'.

Doing so also takes away the choice of people like me: mothers and fathers of children under the age of 12 who may want their child to be cared for by their grandmother or by the next door neighbour who has been volunteering at a school that their child goes to for the past 40 years. That happens to be my direct example, Speaker, my contribution in this debate, because that's what I chose. That's what my husband and I chose, because that's what works for our family.

They're also suggesting here that if a neighbour like Kim Sheldrick wants to open her home, that shouldn't happen. I disagree fundamentally with that. I believe in parental choice, I believe in parental responsibility and I think there needs to be more of that. That is why I've stood, throughout my career in this assembly, for those basic principles of parental responsibility and parental choice.

In fact, if you look back in January 2006, during that really long campaign period for the federal election—it was just before I was elected. At the time, John Baird was running for the Harper Conservatives, and I hosted a press conference for the then leader of the official opposition, Stephen Harper, who was a Conservative candidate to be prime minister; he wasn't quite there yet.

We went to my daughter's Gymboree, and Mr. Harper talked about the universal child care benefit, the \$100 a month. That allowed parents like me to talk about parental choice and where we wanted to send our children for our own child care. I used that money to put my daughter there. In fact, if you come to my office, Speaker, there are three pictures—one of which is endorsed by Sheila Copps—talking about that program, with Stephen Harper holding my little daughter, Victoria, who was just less than a year old.

A few months later, I was elected to this place, and the full-day kindergarten debate emerged. I have been very consistent on this, because I believe that as a parent I should have the right to choose where my child goes for care. At the same time, as a parent, I have a responsibility to ensure that my child is placed in quality and suitable care. But the government of the day—and bless them; I think they come from the right place. A lot of the values that I have, I share with every member here. We all value, for example, our Constitution. We all want a safe environment. But there are places where we do differ.

They think that they as a government should do everything for everyone, regardless of what the cost is. On the other hand, as Progressive Conservatives, we believe in an element of self-reliance. We believe in safe streets and strong families. As Progressive Conservatives, we believe that we should ensure that parents have choice, but

they also have to be responsible for their actions. Everyone should be responsible for their actions.

But they, as Liberals, want to take that responsibility away. They, as Liberals, want to have that responsibility. They want to make our choices for us. That's their prerogative; they're entitled to have that as their belief system, and they're entitled to have that as their core and fundamental value. I just don't agree with it.

When you look at, for example, full-day learning, or even Bill 10, what you're seeing is a government that wants to make choices for parents and take away their responsibility. In so doing, they will eliminate 140,000 child care spaces, making it tougher for people in rural communities and suburban communities to get accessible, affordable care.

As my colleague from Thornhill points out, if your child is at a child care centre or an independent school close to your home and they can go there, it's better for the child because they're in their own community. They're spending less time in the car. There's less gridlock for mom and dad driving all over the place.

These are arguments from another member of this assembly. There are 107 of us here. We all have different perspectives on a variety of things, but the things that unite each of the caucuses are their fundamental beliefs, and why they choose a \$10 membership card to be part of that political party. I don't begrudge anyone here for having different views on certain things than me; in fact, I encourage it. That's why we're in a place of democracy, a place of great debate, just like we are here.

But if there's one thing I can do, it's highlight the challenges that this bill will have, and what the impact will be, not only on the child care operators, but on the families that rely on them and the children who appreciate the care they are receiving in those areas.

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In the limited time that I have left, I want to congratulate my colleague from Simcoe North. He has done with this bill like he has done with other pieces of legislation that have been under his charge as an official opposition critic, most notably with the College of Trades. By the end of this, he'll know more than the minister will ever know, and he will forget more than the minister will ever know, on Bill 10, because that is the type of vigour and passion he brings to a legislative debate. I'm sure you'll recall the same thing with the College of Trades. I want to congratulate him for that and I want to assure the stakeholders who are watching at home that there will be no more committed person to advocate on their behalf than, of course, Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North.

Finally, I want to say to the members opposite, particularly to the government, that I encourage them to allow this bill to travel. During the minority Parliament, we didn't travel at all. I must say, given the fact that the people who are affected by this won't have the resources to travel to Toronto, that they are not professional lobbyists, and that many parents simply cannot come to Queen's Park in order to talk about the impact of this

debate, I would urge the government—particularly the government House leader, but in addition, I think, the Minister of Education—to set the right tone and send this bill throughout the rest of Ontario so that people in Ottawa and Owen Sound, and Sudbury and Windsor, and London and Kitchener, and Kingston and the Islands will have an opportunity to share their opinion on what the impact will be with this legislation. I believe that if they do that, they will send the right message to parents as well.

I look forward to engaging in this debate and I look forward to defending the people who feel they need to be defended against this Liberal government's Bill 10.

Thank you very much. I've enjoyed my debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm very pleased to be able to stand up to speak to Bill 10 today. Even though it's only two minutes, I know I'll have my time to really get into the depth and the teeth that we need to be talking about when it comes to this bill.

I was the MPP who asked the Ombudsman to investigate the system to see where we went wrong and how we can do better—or how they went wrong, not I. The report was absolutely scathing. As I continue to read through this, I find more and more things that are just simply appalling in the state of the system and the way it was. I'll just talk about a few things here and maybe make a few quotes from the Ombudsman.

“Our investigation revealed just how bad it was—and believe me, our title, Careless about Child Care, is putting it mildly.”

“As lax as the rules are for unlicensed daycares, they were barely being enforced by a bureaucracy that shied away from inspections and investigations and preferred to use soft tools of encouragement instead.”

I believe, actually, that the member before me spoke about that, and it's so true. The government has said that they are putting out tools to make things better. They've put in six new inspectors—six, to cover our entire province. How are we possibly going to be able to do this?

There are quotes right here. Use of technology—this was one of the persons. Ministry staff said, “We're so busy. It's not that we don't want children to be protected, but please don't go out looking for them, because we can't handle what we have now.”

We have a major crisis on our hands here. If we don't get this right, if we don't work together to make sure that we're saving our children in this province, the problems are going to continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the members for Simcoe North and Nepean–Carleton for raising my blood pressure on a Thursday afternoon.

I'm the parent of a five-year-old. My wife and I, over the last four years, have experienced the trials and tribulations, the stresses and joys of trying to find adequate care for our daughter. I'm very pleased that she's now in

SK, so that makes it easier for us, as well as hundreds of thousands of other parents across this province.

But to hear those comments from members of the opposition this afternoon—first of all, one of the members being somewhat challenged about understanding the rules of the House—but not reading the Ombudsman's report fully. The Ombudsman is very clear in praising the government in the actions that we've already taken. This bill, when passed, will implement 35 of his recommendations, in addition to the ones that we're already working on, and we'll continue to work on this.

To suggest that 140,000 daycare spaces are going to disappear is utter nonsense. It's fearmongering. To suggest that parental choice is going to be taken away is utter nonsense.

I'm very proud to be sitting on this side of the House—because in the last election, my opponent said that full-day early childhood education is a waste of money. The member opposite said the government is getting into the babysitting business. Well, first of all, early childhood care is a lot more than babysitting. And this government isn't proposing to get into that business. We're proposing to regulate it properly.

I welcome constructive criticism from the opposition—that is their job—but some of what I heard today was not.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm happy to speak briefly on this subject. We often hear about the nanny state, and when it comes to child care I guess it's a bit of a pun there.

I'm somebody who has four children, and I always worked part-time and ran my own business, so I think I have a fair amount of experience in terms of child care. I've always believed that the closer to home your kids were—if they couldn't be in your own home, somewhere nearby—the happier the kids would be. I felt that my kids had great neighbourhood support, even if it wasn't always for child care.

I think it's very important to know your neighbourhood. I think it's very important for kids to know their neighbourhood. I think that's what's so wonderful about many of the home cares that we have across the province: It's often in the neighbourhood; people can walk there. They don't need to drive to pick up kids; they don't need to drive to drop off kids. It provides a sort of community instead of having deserted neighbourhoods—and where kids are basically being institutionalized in big, big centres, leaving the neighbourhoods very quiet. Oftentimes, in a lot of neighbourhoods, the only people who are around during the day are the dog walkers or people who are providing some kind of child care, either to their own kids or other people's kids—and I believe that's what makes communities safe and healthy. I think that's what we want: a healthy environment.

I think that too often we get too involved in people's lives, and I'm concerned, as the member from Nepean–Carleton mentioned, that we're going to drive things underground. I think that's not what we want.

I think that we need to find ways to actually encourage more kids to be raised in homes, their homes as well as their neighbourhood homes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: This bill, G10, and this whole issue of unlicensed child care centres in our province—it's a very emotional issue because it's about our kids. It's about our children.

I want to thank the member from Nepean–Carleton and the member from Simcoe North for their comments and their insight into the bill.

I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain as well, for being the person who had the courage to actually write a letter to the Ombudsman long before bill G10 was introduced in this House.

We lost four kids in the last year in this province at unlicensed daycares, and that is just totally unacceptable.

There are 113 recommendations. We hear that 35 of those recommendations have been implemented. That's great. But there are still quite a few more that need to be implemented.

To the issue of the number of people who actually work in this program: My simple math is, if there are 800,000 kids in unregulated daycare—and I know that number could be a little lower, but it could be much higher, because there is no central registry to determine how many there are—that's 16,000 children who are out there per worker in that program. That's only if those people are actually front-line workers, not including managers, directors and commissioners of programs.

I don't know how adding six people to this program is actually going to get us through another, I don't know, 80 recommendations in any short order. I think what you need to do is to put some real resources to these recommendations and make sure they get implemented in a very timely manner.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now go back to the member for Simcoe North. You have two minutes for your response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I want to thank the members from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Hamilton Mountain, Thornhill and Welland for their comments, and in particular my colleague from—

Mrs. Gila Martow: Nepean–Carleton.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: —Nepean–Carleton.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: She's not here.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: By the way, she's not here right now, but if any of you folks want to buy Girl Guide cookies, they're available in her office. It's probably the only office down here that has Girl Guide cookies for sale.

Miss Monique Taylor: They baited you, and you let them.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You know what? I'm sorry if the minister's not here—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to speak through the Chair—

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I apologize.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say that you have apologized several times. I think now we're starting to take it as though it's a simple matter; it's not a simple matter. We have a little bit of a tradition in this particular room that we tend to observe. When you disrespect the Chair and you start speaking to the member in the NDP, it does not bode well.

I will let you finish your time, but please show respect to the Chair.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her leadership on this in asking the Ombudsman to do that report. Clearly, he showed this government how pathetic a job they've done over the last decade in daycare work—to think they want to rush it through.

The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, you should be ashamed of yourself and your comments. We're trying to protect our children here. We're trying to protect small businesses. All we're asking for is fair hearings across the province. There's nothing wrong with that. People deserve an opportunity for fair hearings, and I would ask everyone in this House to support that.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock and the position we're in with this debate, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1753.

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