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Thursday 16 April 2015

Jeudi 16 avril 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Thursday 16 April 2015

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Jeudi 16 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and,

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, April 27, 2015, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Tuesday, April 28, 2015, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 57:

—notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—witnesses are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis; and

—each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—the deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. on the last day of public hearings; and

—that the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 5 p.m. on Wednesday, April 29; and

—that the committee be authorized to meet on Monday, May 4, 2015, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Tuesday, May 5, 2015, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

On Tuesday, May 5, 2015, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of

all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Wednesday, May 6, 2015. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The votes on second and third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 17.

Mr. Bradley.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Pooled registered pension plans are a new type of voluntary, tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicle. As a new low-cost retirement savings vehicle that is professionally managed and portable from one workplace to another, they're intended to make it easier for employees and self-employed persons to save for retirement. Simply put, PRPPs are a vehicle for the self-employed to be available to invest their retirement savings at a low cost. Contributions are locked in, and benefits at retirement are based on accumulated contributions and investment returns.

The federal government implemented PRPPs for sectors under federal jurisdiction, and also applies to persons employed or self-employed in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The federal Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act and associated regulations came into force on December 14, 2012.

Legislation must be passed by each province before PRPPs can be made available to individuals employed in

provincially regulated sectors and to self-employed individuals working in the provinces. As a result, PRPPs will not be available to the majority of Ontarians until legislation is passed by this House and proclaimed in force, once supporting regulations have been made. That is why we need to move ahead expeditiously with this bill.

The purpose of the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014, is to provide a legal framework for the establishment and administration of PRPPs in Ontario. It would apply to individuals employed in provincially regulated employment, the self-employed in Ontario, as well as individuals employed in federally regulated industries in Ontario whose employers do not offer PRPPs. Given the desire to harmonize PRPPs across the country, the proposed legislation adopts many of the key features of the federal PRPP legislative framework.

Our government recognizes that increasing retirement savings in the province is a complex challenge that requires a multi-faceted approach. Establishing pooled registered pension plans is just one step in our plan, which will encourage investment in voluntary retirement savings tools. That is why I ask the members of this assembly to support Bill 57.

I know that there is a lot of support from members on all sides of the House. The honourable member from York-Simcoe, who had introduced a similar bill previously, said: "I think PRPPs are indeed good and necessary. Obviously, the federal government realized this some time back and passed the legislation that would allow the provinces to implement PRPPs, establishing the minimum standards that all federal PRPPs would have and that PRPP administrators must meet. Each province is responsible for enacting its own PRPP enabling legislation. Quebec has already launched its version of voluntary retirement savings plans. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have also passed legislation."

We couldn't agree more that the time is right to move ahead with this bill.

0910

We also have the honourable member for Nepean-Carleton speaking to this bill and saying, "We in the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus certainly do appreciate the ability to pool pensions and to have that ability for investment...."

Finally, the MPP for Leeds-Grenville stated in debate, in reference to Bill 57, "I'd really like to have at least one of those members that spoke earlier talk about the government's plans to move this bill through committee and ultimately come back to the House for third reading. That's a request, through you, Speaker, to whoever is finishing the two minutes."

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, it is time we move forward with Bill 57. In the last Parliament, this Legislature was ground to a halt and was unable to move forward. Only 39% of government bills were passed in the last, minority government. That's compared to more than three quarters of bills that were passed going back to 1990.

Voters of Ontario sent a clear message last June. They wanted our government to get on with the business of governing in their best interests.

Speaker, as you know, we introduced this bill in December. There has been considerable debate on this bill. We've heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. It is time, in our view, that we end second reading and refer the bill to committee.

In committee, stakeholders will present their views and committee members will have an opportunity to move amendments to the bills. At the same time, the House can move to substantive debate on other matters.

There are a number of important pieces of legislation that have already been introduced which the government would like to debate in the House and move to the legislative process; for instance, Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act; and Bill 66, the Great Lakes Protection Act.

We'd like to spend time to debate some of the other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we cannot do so until Bill 57 is dealt with. I urge all members of this House to support this motion and help pass this bill as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: It's my pleasure to rise today and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act. As you know, Speaker, our caucus has long advocated for PRPPs. In fact, as the member for St. Catharines mentioned earlier, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2013, was introduced in this Legislature by our own member from York-Simcoe, Julia Munro, who is here today.

We, as a caucus, strongly believe that Ontarians deserve the right to choose how they save for retirement. It's no secret that we would like to see this bill go forward, and we're very proud that the member for St. Catharines supported the federal government and Prime Minister Stephen Harper by putting this bill forward.

However, I need to take a moment to highlight my concern over the way in which the government has decided to move this bill forward through the motion that the member for St. Catharines just tabled, a time allocation of this bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Why do they always time-allocate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I don't know. I think the government's willingness to fast-track bill after bill through this House without meaningful debate is perturbing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I haven't spoken to it yet.

Mr. Steve Clark: And that's a good point. My colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke makes a very good point: On several occasions this session, I've had over half of the members in my caucus eager to speak to legislation, to voice the real concerns of their constituents in hope that the government would listen. But time after

time after time, this government has forced closure on bills without adequate debate.

For example, Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act: I had 16 members who were here and willing to speak to that bill.

Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act: I had 14 members of my caucus who were willing to speak to that bill, a very important bill on agriculture.

Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act: I had 18 members who were willing and eager to speak to that bill.

Finally, Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act: I had 16 members who wanted to speak to that bill prior to the government choking off debate. I'm going to get to that term "choking off debate" in a few moments.

It's extremely difficult to stand in this House during question period and hear the Deputy Premier repeatedly say, "The easy part of being in opposition is that you get to oppose. The harder part of being in opposition—and it's a big responsibility—is to propose better ideas." Or, "The easy part of being in opposition is that you get to oppose. But the part where you have a real responsibility is to actually provide constructive advice." That is her quote.

I want to assure you, Speaker, that the Ontario PC caucus has tried, and they will continue to try, to put forward constructive debate and amendments to improve legislation that passes through this House. That becomes extremely difficult when the government continues to present time allocation motions and shut down debate at every turn.

It appears as though my colleagues on the opposite side have forgotten an essential element of the democratic process. I would like to give them a reminder of our invaluable democratic rights, the rights that wars have been fought over to establish and protect. I believe it was best described by the esteemed member for St. Catharines on December 11, 2001. Here is Mr. Bradley's quote: "We are operating in this Legislative Assembly at this time almost exclusively on what are called time allocation motions. That's most unfortunate, because it's what you would call anti-democratic.... [T]his government has consistently used these motions to pass legislation through this House even after this government imposed upon the Legislature drastic changes to the procedural rules of this House to grease the skids for legislation that it deems appropriate for the province.

"The best way to deal with legislation is to have the government sitting most of the year so that it can receive careful analysis and debate in this House and in committees and, in fact, in committees that travel across the province to get meaningful input. We do not have that."

The member for St. Catharines—

Mr. John Yakabuski: He sure changed his tune.

Mr. Steve Clark: He sure has changed his tune.

The member for St. Catharines was absolutely right. It is anti-democratic to speed legislation through this House without adequate debate from all parties. It's not fair to silence the voice of individuals who have reached out to

their MPPs with concerns on particular bills, in hope that they'd be able to bring their concerns right here to this House and to have thoughtful debate around ways to improve legislation.

I want to go back, Speaker, in the little bit of time I'm going to take, to quote from another speech from Jim Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, this time from May 30, 2001: "I regret that we are dealing once again with yet another time allocation motion, which is a motion that chokes off debate in the Legislative Assembly. It is my observation after a number of years, and I think talking to people who have observed this Parliament for a number of years, that it has been diminished so remarkably by this government that it has become almost irrelevant."

I'll go through to later on in his speech: "[O]n all sides I think members have something to contribute: the opposition to concede when the government has made moves that are acceptable and good, and the government members to find problems that might exist in government legislation. But that is virtually gone. It is virtually dictated now by the Premier's office. The speeches we hear in the House tend to be speeches which seem to originate from the government caucus service bureau, and I understand the need for some research for speeches, but they are virtually meaningless, because they can't influence the government or the procedures that take place. That's most unfortunate."

Those quotes were from the member for St. Catharines, from 2001.

I can agree with this speech from that member—not the speech he gave this morning. Frankly, I'm surprised that the member is willing to be a party to, and to be involved in, such behaviour and such disrespect for the principles of democracy he wholeheartedly defended that day.

I'm just going to use one final quote from the member for St. Catharines, this time from November 24, 1993. He says, "I wish to speak to the closure motion which is before the House by once again indicating my concern at the number of closure motions which have been forthcoming from the government House leader and under the NDP government of Bob Rae....

"I can well recall that he felt very strongly about the fact that the opposition should have the opportunity to fully canvass all the arguments on any of the bills before the House, and he was a very strong defender of that particular opportunity....

"I'm concerned about the closure motions because I think they limit legitimate debate. I recognize that a government ultimately might have the opportunity to close down a debate that's been going on a very long period of time. But as I've indicated to the House in days gone by, the purpose of these debates is to canvass public opinion, to make the public aware of what is happening."

The member for St. Catharines expressed many truly excellent ideas by his remarks that day about respecting and valuing the role of individual members. I know the member was sincere when he made that speech 22 years ago, and I believe he feels the same way today.

So again, I appeal to the member for St. Catharines and all the MPPs on the government benches to consider carefully the path you're treading. When you are elected into government, you not only are given power, but you're also given the trust of the people. Don't silence the voices, even though they're opposition voices, by shutting down debate and forcing time allocation.

Our party will be voting against this time allocation motion, Speaker.

0920

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Before I begin, I want to say that I'll be sharing my time with the member for Windsor-Tecumseh and also the member for Nickel Belt.

I was really looking forward to participating in the debate this morning on Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, because I have something to say on behalf of the people I represent in London West. I can't express enough how disappointed I am that the context for me to be offering the perspective of my constituents in London West is around a closure motion to shut down debate on Bill 57, the PRPP act.

This is an issue that is vitally important to the people I represent in London West, to the people that all members of the NDP caucus represent, and many of us have not had an opportunity to yet participate in this debate. We have an obligation to bring forward the concerns of our constituents and to make sure that the fundamental issues of retirement security are addressed appropriately by this Legislature, and that there is an opportunity for all of us to offer the perspectives of the people that we represent and to bring forward some concerns and issues with the legislation. So I'm going to offer the comments that I had prepared on Bill 57, because I want to be on the record about this legislation and about the impact of this bill on my constituents in London West.

I just wanted to share with you a shocking statistic that was reported in the 2014 VitalSigns report by the London Community Foundation: a 300% increase in the poverty rate among seniors in London. That's based on the most recent data from Stats Canada.

Ensuring that seniors can retire with dignity and are not forced to live in poverty is absolutely critical to me and to the people I represent in London West. Of course, there is no issue nearer and dearer to the hearts of New Democrats than pension reform and improving retirement security for Ontarians and, indeed, all Canadians. It's one of the bedrock principles that has long identified our party and that New Democrats have fought for, for decades, at both the federal and the provincial levels.

Sadly, Bill 57 does nothing to address the real crisis in retirement security faced by Ontarians, which is one of the reasons that New Democrats are so concerned about this closure motion and why we believe that debate should continue on this legislation.

We have to stop for a moment and reflect. The inspiration behind this legislation, the impetus for the creation of pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, is none

other than Stephen Harper. This alone should make people think carefully about the real purpose of this bill, who it is actually designed to help, and who will benefit from this legislation. Certainly, it's not low-income seniors. It's not those increasing numbers of seniors who are living in poverty in London and across this province, who are having difficulty making ends meet. These are not the people who will benefit from this legislation.

Bill 57 is modelled after the federal pooled registered pension plan legislation that came into force in 2012. That was based on proposals that were brought forward by the life insurance industry. Bill 57 includes some adaptations for the Ontario context.

The passage of that federal legislation came after four years of determined advocacy by labour groups and by seniors' groups. It also followed seven federal-provincial finance ministers' meetings. These meetings drove home the reality that Canadians were not saving nearly enough for their retirement, and in fact, almost one-third of Canadians do not have any retirement savings at all. They simply have not been able to put money aside.

The meetings also highlighted the need for a safe, affordable and reliable retirement savings vehicle for the two thirds of working Canadians without workplace pensions. We know that such a vehicle already exists. It's called the Canada Pension Plan. We really need to be looking at enhancing the CPP rather than offering these new types of private sector retirement savings options.

As a result of these four years of advocacy, as a result of the seven meetings that were held, a two-pronged strategy was developed. It included the federal PRPP legislation, but it also included a commitment from the federal and provincial governments to look at a modest enhancement to the Canada Pension Plan act to complement the private sector PRPPs and improve retirement security of Canadians.

But of course, it did not take long for the Harper government to backtrack on that commitment. Shortly after the introduction of the federal PRPPs, Stephen Harper made clear that his government was not going to proceed with any enhancement to the CPP. His solution—his only solution—to ensuring retirement security for Canadians was the federal PRPP legislation.

Since only 15% of workers are federally regulated, and most already have workplace pensions, the private sector organizations that had supported the federal PRPP legislation in the first place began to lobby strongly for Ontario PRPP legislation, because they saw that as a great potential market opportunity. These private sector organizations included the life insurance industry, the banks, the CFIB, the Canadian Chamber Of Commerce and others.

In responding to this lobbying campaign, it has been very interesting to watch the evolution of the thinking of the Ontario Liberal government. For years, Ontario Liberals had stood with the New Democrats and supported CPP enhancement as the best and only option. But with the push for PRPPs, the Liberals announced that they would proceed with provincial PRPP legislation, but only

if it was accompanied by a federal-provincial agreement to enhance the CPP. After Stephen Harper rejected enhancing the CPP, the Wynne government nevertheless decided that it would proceed unilaterally with PRPPs in the absence of that CPP enhancement.

What Bill 57 does is allow for the establishment and administration of pooled registered pension plans in Ontario, so it's the Ontario version of the federal legislation, with a few differences.

Bill 57 recognizes the impact of family law on PRPPs and includes provisions dealing with the treatment of spouses, and options following marriage breakdown. This is similar to the treatment of spouses and former spouses under the Pension Benefits Act.

Also consistent with the Pension Benefits Act, Bill 57 protects funds that are in a PRPP account from creditors. It gives the Ontario Superintendent of Financial Services regulatory authority over PRPPs and establishes a process for a PRPP administrator to object to or appeal decisions of the superintendent.

Finally, there are also amendments included in Bill 57 to various other pieces of legislation, specifically adding PRPPs to the definition of a pension plan. Bill 57 also identifies PRPPs as one of the permitted vehicles to which pension plan assets can be transferred by former plan members or eligible spouses, which means that, of course, registered pension plan administrators will have to review whether the terms of their existing plans permit transfers to PRPPs, and they may have to look at amending their plans to enable this option.

The purpose of pooled registered pension plans is to pool risks of companies. In that way, very large pooled funds are created and, in theory, the argument goes, this will keep fees low. But we have a major concern about this theory, based on past history.

0930

First, PRPPs give managers, who are employees of the banks and the insurance companies, basically a monopoly to offer these kinds of retirement savings options. We know from experience that RRSPs and other private sector retirement savings options include hefty private sector management fees. The higher the management fees, the lower the returns to the beneficiary.

Currently, Canadians pay twice as much, or even more, for administration of their RRSPs than do those Canadians who are enrolled in large public pension funds. The CPP investment board, like OMERS and other large provincial public sector workplace pension plans, has been able to keep administration costs very, very low, at less than 1%. This is a major contrast to the private sector experience with RRSPs, and it really makes public sector pensions, like the CPP or OMERS or other plans, a much better sponsor for a retirement savings vehicle than the insurance industry or the banks, which charge 2% or more for RRSPs, which is double the management costs for CPP.

But there are other equally concerning problems with PRPPs. There are no employer obligations to contribute to a PRPP, and just like RRSPs, benefits are based only on what an individual worker can contribute.

Employee participation is strictly voluntary. There's no mandatory enrolment such as we see in other provinces, like Quebec. There's no defined benefit. Workers end up with whatever the market returns are at the date that they decide to retire. So just like an RRSP, employees who are thinking about retiring with a PRPP, if they're thinking about it at a time that the market goes down, may realize that they actually can't afford to retire and will be forced to stay in the workplace.

So the question is, why? Why did the government decide to bring in another private sector retirement option? When you look at the experience with RRSPs, the model that many of us contribute to, it's really hard to make the case that another option was needed.

Canadians are contributing about \$40 billion a year to their RRSPs, and there has been an increase in total RRSP contributions over the last couple of years. But the number of people who are contributing has been virtually unchanged. In addition, there is an estimated \$80 billion in unused RRSP contribution room. As one analyst put it, the RRSP savings pool is getting deeper but not wider. We see the same number of people contributing, and they are contributing more, because these are people who have the means to invest in a private sector pension plan.

More concerning, these savings plans are concentrated in a very small percentage of families, as I just mentioned. According to Stats Canada, 25% of families hold 84% of RRSP assets, and three out of 10 families have no private pensions at all.

RRSPs and other tax-free savings accounts and other private sector options do play an important role for many Ontarians, but they only work for those who have the ability to contribute.

We cannot build a fair and equitable system of retirement security around private sector savings vehicles. When people are living in poverty and barely getting by, buying an RRSP or a PRPP is simply not possible. This is especially the case in my community and, I'm sure, in other ridings across Canada or across Ontario, because of the level of need in the community. The VitalSigns report that I mentioned earlier showed that London's poverty rate has increased over 6% since 2000. We now have a poverty rate that is almost 32% higher than the national average. Londoners absolutely need a publicly funded system that will support them in savings for retirement. They do not need another private sector option.

Before I close, I wanted to talk a little bit about the impact of PRPPs on women. I am the women's issues critic for the Ontario NDP caucus, and I think that it's important that we apply a gender lens to the issues that we discuss in this Legislature.

We're all aware that Ontario's population is aging, but we may be less aware that Ontario's seniors are predominantly female. Women live longer than men. They make up a larger proportion of people over 65, and they make up the overwhelming majority of people who are in the oldest age groups.

At the same time, senior women are almost twice as likely to live in poverty as men, especially if they are

single. Almost one third of elderly women who are on their own live below the poverty line. They are much more likely than men to have to rely on income security programs, like OAS and GIS. In 2008, only 28.6% of senior women's total income was made up of pension and retirement income, compared to 36.6% of senior men's income. We know that immigrant women are particularly vulnerable. Many immigrant women over the age of 65 who have lived in Canada for 10 years or less are without any income at all.

In 2013, the OECD did a study on global pensions and found that rising poverty among Canadian seniors is most acute among elderly women, especially those who are divorced or separated. These higher rates of poverty among senior women reflect the reality of the persistent and widening wage gap, which was a finding of the OECD.

Next week, we will be marking pay equity day here in Ontario, which marks how much longer women have to earn into the next year in order to generate the same level of earnings that men had the year before. This year, women have to have worked all of January, all of February, all of March and three weeks into April before they have earned the same salary that a man earned the previous year.

We know that women also make up the majority of minimum wage earners in Ontario; almost 60% of minimum wage earners are women. They are more likely to have part-time, contract or temporary jobs and other forms of precarious employment, which, as we know, do not come with workplace pensions. They do not come with earnings that enable women to put money into RRSPs or PRPPs or other private sector retirement savings vehicles.

We know that women still shoulder most of the responsibility for caregiving. They have to juggle work and family responsibilities, and often move in and out of the labour force, which has long-term consequences for their income security when they retire, because they may have had to stop their CPP contributions, which of course will reduce their future benefits.

These factors mean, as I mentioned, that women are unlikely to have the advantage of workplace pensions. They are unlikely to have the means to be able to save for retirement. These factors are compounded by women's longer life expectancy, which in effect means that they have to save more than a man would, to be able to retire with dignity and security, because they are living longer.

So what we are seeing in Ontario is that instead of retiring, Ontario women are continuing to work. There was a recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that found that the number of women who stayed in the workforce after age 65 doubled between 2007 and 2013.

We are also seeing that more than half of working women aged 65 to 69 are now working full-time. These are women who should be able to retire, who should be able to look forward to living their final years with dignity, enjoying their grandchildren, but they are now hav-

ing to stay in the workforce. At no time in the last decade have so many women aged 65 or older been in the labour market.

0940

The problem with PRPPs is that they do not take any of these issues into account. They do not take into account the number of women who are employed in precarious jobs, the number of women who work at minimum wage jobs, or the number of women who do not work in paid employment at all because of family caregiving commitments, because of disability or other factors.

The PRPP is a classic example of a policy initiative that does not include a gender lens. Despite the government's stated commitment to gender-based analysis, by bringing forward this policy they are discounting and excluding the experience of women.

I'm going to now turn over to my colleague the member for Windsor–Tecumseh to offer some additional comments on the closure motion and on Bill 57.

Certainly, New Democrats will be voting against the closure motion. We will be continuing to push for enhanced CPP on behalf the Ontarians who do not have workplace pension plans and we will be holding the Liberals to account to ensure that any public pension option includes mandatory employer contributions, automatic enrolment, low administration fees and defined benefits.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's tough to follow my colleague from London West because she always puts so much passion into her very well-researched speech on Bill 57.

Once again I am honoured to be able to stand in this chamber and be the voice of the people in Windsor–Tecumseh. Today, we're discussing time allocation on government Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015. Let us not confuse this proposed legislation with Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act.

Though I must say, Speaker, there are those who—I'm sure—like this confusion that is out there, this bit of smoke and mirrors over these two bills, and perhaps that confusion has led the government to bring in time allocation.

My constituents in Windsor–Tecumseh are good, solid, hard-working people and retirees who understand the value of a good, reliable pension plan. They may not understand why the government doesn't want us to keep talking about pensions in this House, or why the government wants to restrict the time that we're allowed to do so, but they do accept the fact that in Ontario—indeed, in Canada—we should all be able to retire with dignity.

Our senior years, the days we spend in retirement, were once called our "golden years." I'm not convinced that's the case anymore, unless, of course, you happen to work at the top of the heap at one of our banking institutions.

I was on the train home back to Windsor–Tecumseh on Thursday, the day before Good Friday. By chance, I

happened to pick up a copy of the *Globe and Mail*. I took all the time in the world to read it, unlike today where we're having time allocation on Bill 57. The *Globe*, as you know, Speaker, is not a bad paper. I'm sure you've heard of it. Tucked away in the *Globe's* Report on Business section, I stumbled across an article with the headline that read "CIBC's CEO Retirement Pay Surprises Many." Who in this House wouldn't read on after having that headline in front of you?

The opening paragraph grabbed me right away, and here's why: "The outsized compensation packages Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce promised to pay two retired executives has corporate governance specialists scratching their heads—and has even rankled some Bay Street professionals." Who in this chamber wouldn't want to keep reading once you've been intrigued with that? I had to keep going.

In the interest of full disclosure, Speaker, I'm not a banker. I've never worked in a bank. Sometimes I do my banking at ATMs. That's because, like Stephen Leacock, every time I go into a bank I get rattled. The tellers rattle me; the wickets rattle me; the sight of money rattles me; everything rattles me.

A reporter for the *Globe and Mail*, Tim Kiladze—I don't say I pronounce his name properly. I'll spell it: Tim K-I-L-A-D-Z-E. Obviously, Tim doesn't get rattled around banks and bankers. Well, he might, if he only had so much time given to do his banking, like we have only so much time today to talk about Bill 57, because of time allocation.

Tim was poring over the CIBC's proxy circular. I know none of us are ever going to do that. I'm not; that's for sure. But Tim discovers the small print that discloses that the CIBC is continuing to pay Gerry McCaughey, its former CEO, and Richard Nesbitt, its former chief operating officer, very well after they retired from the bank last fall.

Speaker, you and I may disagree on what being paid handsomely means, just as we may disagree on time allocation. So let me try not to get too rattled when I tell you this, but the CIBC will lay out \$25 million to their former senior executives. They do have to split it, of course, just like we're splitting our time on time allocation today. While the rest of us in the non-banking sectors would struggle to pay the hydro bills and put food on the table, and try to maybe squeeze in a short holiday somewhere warm in the colder months, the CIBC is continuing to pay the base salaries, perks and bonuses for many more months to come.

The *Globe and Mail* found this information tucked away. I mean, who would want to go around to the bank's customers and tell them straight up front what their fees and commissions are paying for, right? By next April, Mr. McCaughey will be handed an additional \$16.7 million, and Mr. Nesbitt will be paid \$8.5 million by this October. It's nice work if you can get it, Speaker.

The article also quotes a York University professor, Richard Leblanc, who is also an adviser on corporate governance. I guess I'm surprised that they're time-

allocating this, but Professor Leblanc was surprised by these CIBC terms. In fact, he's quoted as saying, "This can raise outrage.... It sends the wrong signal to the rank and file"—no kidding—just as time allocation sends the wrong signal to the people in this province that the government wants to limit debate on the controversial bill.

These two guys who are getting all this extra money are not on the payroll as advisers. They've retired. Like Elvis, they've left the building. They're gone. They're not doing anything else for the bank these days. Yet somehow, for some reason, your bank fees, Speaker, your interest, your investments are being used in this sweetheart deal to keep paying these two fine gentlemen.

I guess there is actually a law that makes it legal, just as I'm sure the government has a law that allows them to bring in time allocation when they want to silence the voices of the opposition. You see, since both men had earlier given notice that, a couple of years down the road, they wanted to retire, this allowed the board to say, "Well, if you go now, we can give you all this extra money." Nice work if you can get it. So they're kept on the payroll. Some laws are fashioned for a very few, and the rest of us have to deal with everything else that's left over.

According to Jane Milburn, a labour lawyer who specializes in Bay Street clients, not everyone has to do exactly what the CIBC says, just like nobody really has to time-allocate a bill unless they're trying to silence the opposition. You see, if you put on the books that—apparently, you can put in a policy or a contract that says, "If you resign, we have a policy for that. It doesn't mean we've got to pay you two years' salary for going." I mean, who knew?

Speaker, I repeat, this was all published in the *Globe and Mail* on April 2. On that same day in the same newspaper, there was another article, with the headline "New Pension Reality Hits Banks' Corner Offices," this one written by David Milstead. It appears the banks have learned their lesson. At the Bank of Nova Scotia, Richard Waugh retired in late 2013. His pension will hit the max at \$2 million a year. The man who replaced him, Brian Porter, won't be able to get more than \$1.5 million in annual pension, and that's only if he serves 10 years in the top spot.

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Over at the Royal Bank of Canada, Mr. Milstead tells us that last July, at the age of 57, Gordon Nixon was pensioned off at \$1.75 million a year. Speaker, you're in the wrong business. You should have been at the top of one of these banks. If he had stayed on until he was 60, he would have qualified for a pension of \$2 million a year.

Here we are talking about pooled pension plans.

RBC's new CEO, a gentleman by the name of David McKay, is not so lucky. If he stays until he turns 60, he can qualify for an annual pension of \$1.25 million a year, but if he opts out at age 55 in October three years from now, he'll still get \$700,000 a year.

Mr. Michael Mantha: That's it?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That's it.

Bill Downe, D-O-W-N-E, at the Bank of Montreal, has hit his cap of \$1 million a year, but somebody was thinking ahead. He gets his \$1 million a year in American funds—Canadian banker; American funds. I suspect someone on the government side was thinking ahead on this, too, when they brought in time allocation on Bill 57.

Let's turn to my bank, Toronto-Dominion, TD Canada Trust. Here's a name we've all heard in this House for the last days and weeks and months, and making big news this morning: Ed Clark, with Mr. Clark, who is making decisions on so many issues affecting all of us, each and every one of us here in Ontario these days, making a big announcement this morning. According to the *Globe and Mail*, Ed Clark retired last October with an annual pension of \$2.5 million a year. Here's a guy out there now making decisions that affect us all, those of us struggling on the old age pension and the Canada Pension Plan: \$2.5 million a year for Mr. Clark—a nice chunk of change. I know a few retirees who would love to live just on the interest on \$2.5 million. I'm one of them, Speaker, and I'm sure you are as well.

Good for Mr. Clark, I say. I've never met the man. I'm sure he's a fine gentleman. Perhaps I'll never meet him. I hear he's a very generous man. Well, I guess he can afford to be.

Now, this isn't meant in any way as a slight to Ed Clark, or any of the other bankers raking in the big bucks in their golden years. I just think it would be nice to share more of that gold with the people who made it possible: the customers of Canada's banks. We all do our banking at our Canadian banks and trust companies, credit unions. The clients of these banks, those of us who take out the loans or get cash out of the ATM—by the way, after Ed Clark retired with his pension of just under \$2.5 million a year, the man who replaced him, Bharat Masrani, had his pre-CEO pension frozen and will accrue \$110,000 towards his CEO pension each year he remains in the top job until he hits the max at \$1.35 million a year.

Back to Mr. McCaughey for a moment. According to the *Globe and Mail*, he spent 10 years at the top of the CIBC, but because he worked for a number of years at other CIBC-related investment banking companies, the board, in the board's wisdom, gave him nearly 22 years of extra service credit—21.9, actually, Speaker.

Back to Ed Clark for a moment. He was entitled to a full pension when he turned 62. He decided to stay on a little bit longer, so when he stayed on past that date, TD gave him a stock option award with a value of \$4.7 million in an agreement to cap his pension payouts.

Well, I know we're working on time allocation, but the little guy seems to be getting lost in this debate. In case you're wondering, unlike Bill Downe at the Bank of Montreal, Mr. Clark's \$4.7 million is in Canadian funds, not in American.

I thank the *Globe and Mail* for making all of this information public. I believe everyone in Ontario should be aware of how well our banking institutions treat their

senior executives. Maybe this information will be used by some of our constituents as they consider their career options—it's a good job if you can get to the top in the banking industry—or, indeed, their banking choices.

Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2015: The sad, sad fact of life, Speaker, as you well know, is that two thirds of us in Ontario do not currently have a workplace pension plan. That wouldn't be so troublesome if our personal savings were such that we could rely on them to top us up, but who are we kidding? We're not bankers. We're not senior corporate executives. Our pension planning comes on Wednesday and Saturday, when we buy a 6/49 ticket, or a Lotto Max on Fridays. For many of us, that's our pension plan, or that's what we're hoping to get out of it.

We hold out hope to make it eligible for the Canada Pension Plan, the CPP, but even so, that maxes out currently at, what, \$12,500 a year? That's the top of the scale. Many of our constituents will only get the average of \$6,800. Believe me, no one's going to time-allocate their views on that.

Speaker, I want to skip ahead a bit because I know that the member from Nickel Belt, who is going to use up some of the last of our time, wants to jump in and make some notes. Let me just go ahead for a moment, if I can.

Mr. Michael Mantha: That's the problem when you silence debate.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, that's the thing: You want to keep talking and you can't, right?

This PRPP—and I stress the “PP,” because this plan will trickle huge amounts of money into the coffers of the big banks and the insurance companies like that one. We know they need as much as they can get to pay for those wonderful, generous pension plans for their senior executives. It will also allow employers to get away without making contributions.

PRPPs are a commodity, a product, a revenue tool for banks and insurance companies, where administrative fees are charged instead of benefiting retirees the way they should.

Speaker, at that, I thank you for your time this morning. I say to anyone who's listening, thinking about what kind of career they're going to get into in Ontario: Get into the banking industry. Work hard; get to the top. You won't have to worry about pooled registered pension plans.

With that, I'll turn the rest of our time over to the wonderful member from Nickel Belt.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? Last call for further debate. The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. I didn't want to rise right away because I didn't know if any of my colleagues from the Liberals or the PCs were going to stand up. I will use my two minutes wisely.

Basically, Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, doesn't do a whole lot of things that don't already exist. Any one of us in Ontario who has money can contribute to a bank RRSP. The lucky ones of us who

have a little bit of money at the end of the month, we do that. But for a lot of people, it's not a question.

What you have to realize here is that what the government is doing is actually giving the banks and the insurance companies that will hold those pension plans the right to deduct money from your cheque, whether you want to or not.

Right now, in order for them to deduct money from your cheque, you have to consent. But if you work for an employer who decides that one of those pooled registered pension plans is just the ticket he needs—they won't have to contribute to it. They won't have to do anything. The bank will do everything for them. Then, if your employer does this, you have lost the right to hold onto your cheque.

If we pass this bill and your employer signs a deal with a bank or an insurance company—and the member from Tecumseh certainly made it clear as to how much money those people have—if we pass Bill 57, then they will have the right to take money off your cheque.

The NDP does not think that this is something that Ontario needs. What Ontario needs is security in retirement, not giving the bank and the insurance company access to your paycheque, no matter how small it is, so that they can pay themselves millions of dollars.

We think that this is wrong. We disagree with what this bill does, but we agree we need to do better to make sure that people live their final years in retirement in financial security.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? Last call for further debate.

Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 17. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 15, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to have this opportunity this morning to speak to second reading of Bill 66, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin, the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015. I found out precisely 30 minutes ago that I would

be given this opportunity, so I'm really excited about the chance to speak. It says something about how the House is developing its plan as it goes; it's a very exciting that we're here this morning to discuss this important issue.

I think it's important to put this legislation in some sort of fiscal context because, as we know, the Ontario budget is going to be tabled in this House on April 23. It's quite late, Mr. Speaker. Normally, in recent years, the budget has been tabled around the end of the fiscal year, sometimes before the fiscal year concludes, towards the end of March; and now we're into the month of April. But at least we finally do know the day that the budget will be presented: April 23.

The economic numbers that I'm using are the ones that the government presented in the fall economic outlook and fiscal review, which was tabled in the House towards the end of the year. We know that in that important document which the government presented to the House last fall, the government was projecting a \$12.5-billion deficit for the fiscal year 2014-15. That is the fiscal year that ended at the end of March, just a few weeks ago.

It's also important to point out that the government has informed us that they have revised the deficit number for that fiscal year that's just finished. They now anticipate a deficit of \$10.9 billion—somewhat less than they presented in the House. Again, that makes us question where this original number came from and what changed in the interval. Was it a case of the government over-estimating the deficit so that it could come into this House and then crow about having done something positive by reducing that deficit number—if in fact that deficit was artificially inflated when it was presented in the House in the fall?

But it's also important to point out that the deficit in the previous year was \$12.5 billion. The government would have us believe that they are, in fact, reducing the deficit each year such that they can balance the budget by 2017-18. The reality is that even if the deficit number for the fiscal year just finished comes in at \$10.9 billion, as they've said recently, it's still an increase, year over year, in the deficit of some \$400 million. If they're going to balance the budget by 2017-18, as they lead us to believe, as they repeatedly say, you would think and assume—and most people would agree—that the deficit should be coming down year over year such that it comes down to zero by 2017-18. In fact, as I said, we see the deficit actually increasing.

The fall economic statement projected a net provincial debt leading up to the end of the fiscal year, the end of March, of \$287.3 billion. I think it's important to point out that the debt was actually \$139 billion in 2003, which is of course the year of the provincial election when the Liberal government took power. The deficit has doubled during that time—sorry, the debt, rather; the provincial debt, the net debt, has doubled since the Liberals took office.

The provincial government spending that was projected in the fall economic statement: \$130.2 billion, up from \$126.4 billion last year. The net debt per capita—

Mr. Joe Dickson: Point of order: Just to remind the member to speak to the bill. It's Bill 66, the Great Lakes Protection Act. We're all over the world, but let's deal with the real issue at hand: the Great Lakes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'm listening to the member carefully, and I would ask him to come around to the bill that's in front of us.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate your ruling, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely correct. It is important that members speak to the bill, and I feel I am speaking to the bill because I'm talking about the fiscal context in which this bill has been introduced.

I'll just finish up here. The net debt per capita in the province of Ontario from the fall economic statement: \$21,003, up from \$11,339 in 2003—almost a doubling of the net debt per capita. In effect, the amount of each of us in Ontario owes because of years of provincial government overspending has almost doubled since this government took power. It's the amount that each Ontarian owes—every man, woman and child—because of years of government overspending.

The interest payments on the debt: \$10.8 billion. This is the third-largest item in the budget after health and education, and, again, expected to increase about \$1 billion a year for the foreseeable future. By 2017-18, the government's own documents suggest and project an almost \$14-billion annual interest payment because of the growing—and exploding, really—provincial debt.

Again, I put these numbers on the table in the context of this debate because, with the fiscal profligacy of this this government, I think it's important to remind Ontarians, and the House, in fact, that we are facing a severe financial problem in this province of Ontario because of overspending on the part of the Liberal government. All of the legislation that is debated and discussed in this House has to be put in some sort of context. The financial problem that we face is growing more severe by the day as we borrow more and more every day, every hour of every day, because of this government's unwillingness to show fiscal restraint.

Bill 66: As we know, Mr. Speaker, the stated purpose of this bill is “to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin; and....

“to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.”

The bill, if passed, would create a guardian council, as the government calls it in the bill, and the minister would, “as he or she considers advisable,” extend invitations to individuals from a variety of stakeholder groups to participate in this council. The council would be required to meet within one year of the act coming into effect and at least one meeting in every subsequent calendar year. So this guardian council would be expected to meet annually if this bill were to pass.

The council would be established to provide advice but not be a decision-making body. The stated purpose of the council would be to provide a forum to identify prior-

ities for actions, potential funding measures and partnerships, and facilitate information sharing. The minister would ultimately be the one who would decide on initiatives—I assume in consultation with cabinet.

The legislation would not call for the presence of specific groups as mandatory at meetings; nor would it require balanced representation from the hundreds of communities attached to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.

The bill would require the government to maintain Ontario's current Great Lakes Strategy and require the strategy to be reviewed by the end of 2018, which is just a few years away, and at least every six years afterwards. The minister, in consultation with the other Great Lakes ministers, would table progress reports to the assembly every three years.

After consulting with the other Great Lakes ministers, the minister would, if empowered by Bill 66, “establish qualitative or quantitative targets relating to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin” that would have the power to overriding existing legislation—for example, the Nutrient Management Act that was passed by this Legislature some years ago.

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Within two years, the minister would “establish at least one target ... to assist in the reduction of algae blooms in all or part of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin....

“The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry may, after consulting with the other Great Lakes ministers, establish one or more qualitative or quantitative target in respect to preventing the net loss of wetlands in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.”

Of course, if we look at the issue of geographically focused initiatives, any member of the public would be able to submit geographically focused initiatives, or GFIs as they're called, to be considered by the council and approved by the minister, essentially making the council, we say, perhaps a pointless layer of red tape that could be avoided through direct ministry submission.

The act would undoubtedly lead to greater loss of municipal autonomy; I think that's clear. According to the bill, despite any other act and initiative, a GFI, a geographically focused initiative, would prevail “in the case of conflict between a designated policy set out in the initiative and,

“(a) an official plan;

“(b) a zoning bylaw; or

“(c) ... a policy statement issued under section 3 of the Planning Act.”

If there is a conflict with existing legislation, “the provision that provides the greatest protection to the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin prevails.”

Our caucus critic on the environment file is Lisa Thompson. She is the member for Huron-Bruce. She's doing an outstanding job of responding to the government's policy with respect to the environment. We are

engaged in our role as opposition, pointing out the flaws and drawbacks of the government's legislation.

In recent days, of course, the government has committed to a new cap-and-trade policy that they say is an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the province of Ontario. They've signed an agreement with the province of Quebec and the state of California to enter into this cap-and-trade scheme.

We've asked a lot of questions about this issue in the Legislature. This is an important environmental issue, Mr. Speaker, so I think it's important to discuss it in the context of this Bill 66 debate. We have said that the real motive behind cap-and-trade is actually to disguise a massive revenue increase, in the order of \$1 billion to \$2 billion, and that it in fact is a tax by another name.

We see that there are many valid questions about cap-and-trade and we really have not had an answer to the most basic and fundamental question: How much will it cost the average Ontarian and how can we get assurance of where the money will go? I've asked the rhetorical question through Twitter: "Will the Premier issue a public challenge to all Ontarians to reduce their carbon footprint, before she gets on a jet to California?" I would anticipate and expect that there will be cabinet ministers jetting off to California to monitor the progress of this initiative. I think it's important to ask that question as well.

The government's stated commitment is that the money, whatever money is generated as a result of cap-and-trade, will go towards, I believe, transit initiatives or other initiatives with respect to the environment. I would ask if in fact the money is going to be set into a dedicated fund in that regard or if it's just going to be funnelled into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. As we've seen in the past with the government's health tax—they call it the health premium—that they introduced in their first budget after coming to power in 2003-04, we were told that the health premium would be going towards health care. What we found out later, of course, was that in fact the money generated from the health premium was just going into the Consolidated Revenue fund and that it was a brand new provincial income tax; it was not even a health premium. So the government has the record of a shell game with respect to the health premium, which is really, as I say, a brand new provincial income tax. We would question, again, whether or not they're being sincere with this commitment.

I would also ask: Why is it that the Premier's first instinct when it comes to working with business is to be hostile and punitive? Why isn't she prepared to work with our job creators to try to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

I would also suggest that we see across the world, where cap-and-trade has been introduced and has been established, that there is not a single jurisdiction where the process isn't being gamed by the participants.

Lastly, I would ask again that the government table an independent economic analysis of cap-and-trade in the Legislature so that we know what the pros and cons are

and how many jobs are in fact going to be exported as a result of this policy.

Getting back to Bill 66, Mr. Speaker, our position as a caucus is this: The role and purpose of the guardian council remains largely unclear. We ask: What are the benefits of creating this council that cannot be achieved through other legislative tools and public consultation processes?

We say that, as it stands, the proposed guardian council will become a tool by which the government can appease its Liberal friends, and the minister is only mandated to invite those stakeholders "that he or she considers advisable." This limits the—thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You may know that the Premier and her cabinet have organized two lock-ups, followed by a press conference this morning, that were organized in such a way as to conflict with question period. They are announcing this morning what will more than likely be the single biggest policy initiative to be carried out by this government in the 41st Parliament: the sell-off of Hydro One.

They have by design organized this in such a way that one must conclude that the only reason they are doing so is to manipulate control of the message of this policy initiative. They are attempting to game the timing of their announcement in such a way that it avoids the immediate scrutiny of question period.

I'll be very brief. O'Brien and Bosc says question period "is this part of the parliamentary day where the government is held accountable for its administrative policies and the conduct of its ministers, both individually and collectively." I would add to this that the government has been clear that this announcement will form the basis of its budget's fiscal framework for this year.

I say, is this a budget? No. But Speaker Carr's ruling on the Magna budget, on May 8, 2003, had some questions that equally apply to the decision by the Premier to do an end run around this House.

I am not going to quote Speaker Carr at length; I only have two points. Speaker Carr said in his second point, "If left unchallenged, will this incident ... embolden future governments to create parallel, extra-parliamentary processes for other kinds of events that traditionally occur in the House?" And I would argue that question period is one of them.

His third point is, "Why is an extraordinary parliamentary process needed if there is already a process in the House? If the answer is that it enables direct communication with the public, to what extent does such an answer undermine the representative, scrutiny and accountability functions of" this House?

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you adjourn question period after introduction of guests so as to allow sufficient time for the Premier and her cabinet colleagues to return to this House so that we, the opposition, on behalf of the public and beholden to our parliamentary responsibility, are able to question the government in regard to what will prove to be the single biggest shift in government policy in the 41st Parliament.

The last point I will say: I also want to inform you, Speaker, that New Democrats believe that this action by Premier Wynne is a breach of our parliamentary privilege, and we will be providing you with arguments to that effect later.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On the same point of order, the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I feel very strongly, as does my colleague beside me, the third party House leader, that this government can't run roughshod over standing orders and the traditions of this place. Question period, in our Westminster system, is the opportunity for the opposition to hold the government to account. This is a long-standing tradition. For the government to make these decisions today on major government announcements and then absent themselves from this Parliament, to me, is unconscionable. I believe you need to rule, and the government needs to realize that this place, for all 107 MPPs, is a place that we cherish. We need to be able to provide that opportunity to hold the government to account.

This is disgraceful, these government benches. I hope you will take Mr. Bisson's point of order seriously. I know members of my party will do the same.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I would be remiss if I did not present to you facts in relation to the point of order that was raised by the House leader from the third party.

Speaker, I think the facts are as follows: For some time, the Premier has outlined that she has an advisory council that has been doing some work on asset optimization and that at some point, that advisory council would be tabling its recommendations to the government. Today is such a day; the advisory council is presenting its recommendations. What the Premier is merely doing is responding to those recommendations.

The Premier has been available in this House in a large majority of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I intend to hear the points being made by everyone clearly, and I do not want interruption.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. The Premier has been available in this House question period after question period, answering to questions of the opposition on a myriad of issues, including the issue around the work that the advisory council on asset optimization has been doing. The Premier fully intends to be in the House next question period and beyond to answer questions.

Any government policy that will be deliberated upon will be presented in the formal budget that will take place

on April 23, next Thursday, as announced by the Minister of Finance.

The members of the government's executive council are in the House today to participate fully in question period and answer any questions that the members of the opposition would have in that regard, so I urge you to disallow this point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A continuation of the point of order? The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A continuation, Mr. Speaker, and very briefly: I just say again, the government is in control of the timing. It's clear that they have gamed this in order to be able to not allow the opposition to ask questions. They could have done this any other way that would have allowed that; they did not. I think Speaker Carr's ruling was pretty clear—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I—

Mr. Steve Clark: Disrespect of the House: That's what it is.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would appreciate an opportunity—with silence—to respond.

It is understood that no one is compelled to attend and that the government provides information to the opposition of their presence in the House as a courtesy. It is not demanded by protocol. The member from Timmins–James Bay has indicated that there is a concern that it might be a breach of privilege, which is different from a point of order on this particular topic. So I will allow that to happen and anticipate that it will happen.

As far as the point of order is concerned, they are not compelled to attend, and, quite frankly, that's my ruling. It's something that can happen without breaching any orders. So that's it. That's my ruling.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, I understand it's your ruling, but I've also asked you to adjourn this House until such time as the Premier and her cabinet are here to answer questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order in terms of a request of the House, so that's not going to happen.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to introduce Mr. William Stevens. He's the CEO of Mushrooms Canada, and he came in from Guelph this morning.

I would also like to introduce Susan McBride, who's the director of human resources for Highline Produce Ltd., the largest employer in Prince Edward county: the Highline Mushrooms factory.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like welcome page captain Ashton Corr's father, who's here today: Stephen Corr. I'm not sure where he is but I'd like to welcome him. I know he's in the building.

Congratulations to Ashton for being the page captain today.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It is with great pleasure that I welcome participants and leaders from the Royal Bank of Canada Career Launch Program. I was with them earlier when this program got going early this year. We have Susan Uchida, Rehana Ciriani, Judy Dobbs, Lindsey Hartshorn, Elynn Wareham, Peggy Capitain, Vanda Hudak, Joshua Wittingham, Neelam Sian, Daniel Mayer, Erica Baillie, and Christopher Lee-Hon-Siong.

All are here in the members' gallery. Please join me in welcoming them here to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce Dennis Prouse in the members' gallery, from CropLife Canada. Welcome, Dennis.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I would like to introduce Craig Saunders in the gallery from OPSEU. He's here today to observe.

1040

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to welcome, from Simcoe Community Services, Marion Graves, the CEO, and Jamie Hall of stakeholder relations.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to introduce Carmela Betel and her friend Lucy Shaar, who came down today to hear the statements on Holocaust Memorial Day and Yad Vashem, as well as to attend the reception which will begin at 11:15 in room 228.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to welcome to Queen's Park four constituents from the riding of Northumberland—Quinte West: Robin Pilon, Jacques Pilon, Maddy Pilon and Dan Howell, in the east gallery.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I am very pleased to welcome Bridget Girard and her daughter Jacquie, from our lovely riding of Durham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm happy to introduce my father, who is in the members' east gallery, who was 90 years young yesterday—welcome—and my partner, Chris Van der Vyver, the most loyal partner that one could ever hope for.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It's a pleasure to have in the House, from CropLife, Dennis Prouse, vice-president of government affairs, and also a constituent of Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I just want to welcome two folks who are former students of mine at York University: Dibya Pal and Vinayak Nagarajan. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jim Wilson: This question is for whoever is Acting Premier today. Hey, lucky man.

Speaker, to the Acting Premier: Section 50.3(1) of the Electricity Act reads: "All proceeds payable to Her Majesty in right of Ontario in respect of the disposition of any securities or debt obligations of, or any other interest in, Hydro One Inc., a corporation established under section 50, a corporation or other entity established under

section 50.1 or an arrangement made under section 50.1 shall be paid to the financial corporation."

Acting Premier, are you going to follow the law? Are you going to pay down the \$27-billion hydro debt with the money you get from the sale of Hydro One?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for the question. First of all, Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, we know that Mr. Ed Clark will be tabling his recommendations later today. I think it would not be wise to pre-empt what's in the report.

What's clear, and something that the Premier has been very clear about, Speaker, is that we want to find opportunities to unlock the value in the tremendous assets we have in our province and be able to use that value to fund critical public infrastructure that is needed in the process, such as our highways, our transit and our transportation infrastructure. That's something that we presented to the people of Ontario in the last election, and we continue to work on that to build Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: To the Acting Premier: The reason we put the law into place was to ensure that the money from any sale of Hydro One would be used to pay down the debt and provide relief to hydro customers through lower electricity rates. After all, it's the hydro customers that own Hydro One. You're planning on doing the exact opposite. You're going to run off with the sale proceeds and leave customers with a \$27-billion debt to pay. That can only mean higher hydro rates.

Deputy Premier, can you guarantee hydro customers that a sale of Hydro One will not result in higher hydro bills for decades to come?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I think it's ironic to get this question from the party and the member opposite, who actually saddled Ontario taxpayers with this enormous stranded hydro debt. They are the ones who left this unsavory legacy to the people of Ontario that they are working hard towards paying off. In fact, it's this government that, year by year by year, has been paying off that stranded hydro debt, to the point that we can now proudly—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, over the last 12 years, we have been paying off that debt that was left by the previous Conservative government. We are up to the point that we will be removing the debt retirement charge from the consumer ratepayers, because they have played part in that case.

We will continue to make sure that the stranded debt is paid. That's something that was left behind by the official opposition when they were in government.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: The majority of the \$27-billion debt comes from David Peterson's decision to not have Darlington come in on time and on budget—in fact, \$14 billion over budget; that's the majority. The rest of it was

incurred by the old Ontario Hydro before I was even born and before you were even born. So get your story straight—

Applause.

Mr. Jim Wilson: —and stop telling falsehoods to the people of Ontario.

You have an obligation under the law not to fritter the money away, not to rob Peter to pay Paul—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In between the applause, I did hear something I would like him to withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

You have an obligation, Minister, and I say to the government, to pay down that debt. It's legacy debt. It's debt that has been there for a long time. We're paying big interest on it. Hydro customers own Hydro One. They should be the ones who benefit through lower rates, or at least stable rates, for the next few decades. That's the purpose of the law.

We knew some scoundrel would come along at this point in history and try and steal that money for other purposes, to patch up your mismanagement of the last 12 years. Do the right thing and follow the law.

Interjections.

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

Before I continue, I'm going to offer a caution that, as we move along in this, I'm starting to hear some on-the-edge stuff and something I actually asked to be withdrawn. Let's just keep it within parliamentary language, please.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It's rather rich to get this question—

Mr. Todd Smith: You're right. It's rich.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —from the official opposition, who made a mess, a big mess—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —of the hydro system in this province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —when they were in government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I am going to repeat myself, to ensure that those who were making noise while I was speaking—the member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order, the member from Simcoe North will come to order and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, that's the party that, when in government, made a mess of the hydro system in

this province. They had too many false starts. They were burning dirty coal to produce electricity in this province, polluting our air, causing asthma in our children. They're the ones who had that momentous blackout in our province; burning diesel in—

Interjections.

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

Finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We have been working hard over the last 12 years in rebuilding the energy system in this province, making sure that we clean up the energy system by shutting down coal-fired generation, making sure that we have renewable green electricity in our system and a reliable source of electricity for Ontarians.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: To the Acting Premier: The Premier herself claimed the cost of gas will increase over three cents under the Liberals' pay-to-pollute scheme, and with this Liberal government's track record, we know it will end up costing much more.

Even if we pretend it will only be three cents, as you claim, that will cost Ontarians an additional \$700 million a year. That's another \$100 to Ontario families, to shoulder your burden of mismanagement.

In rural Ontario, people don't have the choice not to drive. How are rural families, who must buy gas to get to work and get to school, regardless of the price, going to be able to afford this increase?

1050

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, I want to congratulate our Premier and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for taking a most important and momentous decision when it comes to ensuring that we actually deal with the issue of climate change in our province by introducing the cap-and-trade system. The official opposition needs to get their head up out of the quicksand. They've got to choose a lane. Are they going to continue to deny climate change or are they going to stand up for Ontarians and the future of our province when it comes to a cleaner environment and a better and stronger economy?

I guess now we know what the PC Party stands for. It's the pro-coal, pro-carbon party of Ontario. They're the only ones who are standing in support of carbon. The whole world is moving forward in making sure that we put a price on carbon and that we deal with greenhouse gas emissions because it is essential to the future prosperity of our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Acting Premier: This isn't the first time that the Liberals have copied a European energy plan before they saw the evidence. Your Green Energy Act was supposed to save the environment, reduce pollution and create jobs.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Instead, it caused energy prices to skyrocket, made your Liberal friends rich and drove jobs out of this province. This pay-to-pollute scheme will be the Green Energy Act 2.0. However, this time, it won't just be electricity rates that soar. It's now a tax on everything. The Green Energy Act costs each household \$1,100 a year.

Acting Premier, how much more will your pay-to-pollute scheme cost Ontario households?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I am—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Continue.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm fascinated by this line of questioning, Mr. Speaker. The party opposite put a cap-and-trade system on nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide. They traded between companies. They're down 46%. Mr. Speaker, you can hear that this is a very sensitive issue for the party opposite given how loud they're being right now.

We are about to design a cap-and-trade system. Where it is in place, in places like California and Quebec, it is actually enabling higher productivity. A carbon price in BC saw accelerated GDP growth and lower costs for everyone. When they learn something about the difference between cap-and-trade and taxes, which is sort of 101 for an MPP, they should—

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Acting Premier: The degree to which this government has lost touch with reality is mind-boggling. One day, they rise in the House to tell us how Ontarians are not saving enough for retirement. The next day, they create a tax on everything that will take money right out of their pockets, right out of their savings accounts. Higher costs mean less disposable income. That means less money to save and less money to spend to keep the economy moving. That is basic economics.

Acting Premier, how much money will your tax on everything take from the retirement savings accounts of Ontarians?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think it's time for a little lesson in basic economics here. Tembec—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh yeah, we'll get that from you, Glen. You of the million-dollar toilet.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, that got you your second one. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order, and the member from Lanark, come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tembec, a great Ontario forestry company, reduces its emissions and improves its plant. The average GHG emissions from an average forestry company, let's say, is 50%. We set the cap at 40%. Tembec is at 30%. Tembec then has a surplus. It may sell it to Cascade, which may

need two or three years to do that. Cascade then can buy the time. The money Tembec gets back is reinvested in a higher-productivity plant, more jobs. That's how it works.

It's a good thing, as Martha Stewart would say.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question: The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is for the Acting Premier. First, the Liberals showed how they disrespect Ontarians by keeping their plan to sell Hydro One secret during the election campaign. Now they are disrespecting Ontarians and this assembly in the way that they've rolled out the Clark report.

My question to the Acting Premier is: Can he phone the Premier and tell her to get over here and answer the questions of the opposition?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm compelled to indicate that if this continues, I shall pass the question and move to the official opposition.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As stated, I'm indicating to the third party that if this continues, I will pass their questions and move to the official opposition.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now I'm not going to do that if I continue to hear it from this side.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is the official opposition prepared to ask the next question? I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

POWER PLANT

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, yesterday, the Globe and Mail uncovered yet another sordid chapter in the ongoing saga of the gas plant scandal. One of the Liberal Party's favourite companies, Eastern Power Ltd., has gotten special treatment yet again.

The company at the centre of the gas plant scandal has been given another sweetheart deal wherein they get natural gas at far below market value. Over the next two decades, this will save them millions of dollars.

The Ontario Energy Board is supposed to be there to protect consumers. How do consumers benefit from this decision? With this ruling they're going to be fleeced yet again by your government due to higher natural gas prices for consumers.

Acting Premier, when you cancelled the gas plants during the election of 2011, did you promise Eastern Power that they would get cheap gas in the future so that they would keep quiet on your cynical, unethical, Liberal seat-saving decision?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I don't know if it's something that I said that got the third party all worked up, but I thank the member from Renfrew—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay will come to order. The leader of the third party will come to order. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay will come to order. The leader of the third party will come to order. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay is warned. The leader of the third party is warned. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay is named.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Sergeant-at-Arms will dismiss the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Bisson was escorted from the chamber.

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of the third party is named.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Sergeant-at-Arms will dismiss the leader of the third party.

Ms. Horwath was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane is named.

Mr. Vanthof was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The remaining members of the third party caucus will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The remaining members of the third party will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The remaining members of the third party caucus are warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is named.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Sergeant-at-Arms will dismiss the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Parkdale–High Park, the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Toronto–Danforth are named.

Ms. DiNovo was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Sergeant-at-Arms will dismiss the member from Nickel Belt.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I refer to the standing orders, section 15(c): “If any member on being named and directed to withdraw from the House refuses to obey the direction of the Speaker when summoned under the Speaker’s order by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker shall call to the attention of the House that force is necessary in order to compel obedience and such member shall thereupon, without motion, be suspended from the service of the House for the remainder of the session.”

Interjections.

Mr. Tabuns was escorted from the chamber.

M^{me} Gélinas was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the member from London–Fanshawe, the member from Hamilton Mountain and the member from London West are named.

Mr. Singh was escorted from the chamber.

Ms. Armstrong was escorted from the chamber.

Ms. Taylor was escorted from the chamber.

Ms. Sattler was escorted from the chamber.

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members from Algoma–Manitoulin, Windsor–Tecumseh and Niagara Falls are named.

Mr. Mantha was escorted from the chamber.

Mr. Hatfield was escorted from the chamber.

Mr. Gates was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The question having been put by the official opposition, I will allow the Acting Premier to respond.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think I can hear things again now. Apologies to the members of the community here in the public gallery for the question period they have witnessed so far.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I may not be finished naming people.

Finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As the member opposite I am sure knows, private sector gas distribution companies are regulated by the Ontario Energy Board. The OEB is an independent regulator with a mandate to protect the best interests of energy consumers in Ontario. As an independent regulator, the OEB has the authority to enforce its statutory powers.

I understand that in this particular case, the OEB has ruled that it will grant the certificate to Greenfield on the

basis that it is in the best public interest and that customers will not be unduly burdened. The government supports the board and its processes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, where was I? Acting Premier, there is an odour around this OEB decision and it has nothing to do with the smell of natural gas. This sweetheart deal is going to result in higher prices for consumers. After 12 years of Liberals in office, energy customers can hardly afford further increases to their cost of living.

After all of the scandals during your long reign in power, the people of Ontario know how you do business: special deals and favours for well-connected Liberal insiders who scratch your back when election time rolls around.

Acting Premier, I ask you once again: How can voters believe that you did not offer Eastern Power cheap gas so that they would go along with your Liberal seat-saving plan back in the 2011 election?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I am confident that the member opposite very well knows the kind of system we have in place in Ontario. The regulation around pricing and approval process in the energy sector is done by an independent regulator called the Ontario Energy Board. It is a quasi-judicial body; it's arm's length from the government. The government does not intervene in the matters or the affairs of the Ontario Energy Board. It has a very robust process, in fact, where the public and proponents and opponents can participate. We respect the process and the decisions that the Ontario Energy Board makes. I ask the member opposite to respect their decision as well.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, we will not be participating in this question period—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did not recognize the member—

Ms. Cindy Forster: —until the Premier arrives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Simcoe North.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Education. When asked about OSSTF walking away from negotiations during the scrum yesterday, you simply shrugged it off. You implied that this was just a tactic and they would be back in no time.

We've been saying it for years: You have severely mismanaged the province's finances and as a result of that we are broke. Because of that, on Monday, children in Durham might show up at a school to face a picket line, and other boards will follow soon after. Your Liberal mismanagement will force thousands of kids out of the classroom.

Minister, please don't shrug this off. Will you get serious about negotiations and prevent this strike from happening?

Hon. Liz Sandals: First of all, I must say that that was a serious misrepresentation of what I said yesterday. What I said yesterday was that we remain absolutely committed to being at the table and negotiating and that I am, in fact, very concerned that OSSTF chose to walk away from the provincial table.

What I would also point out is that they said they suspended their participation at the provincial table. They did not say they ended their participation at the provincial table. I did point out the accurate words that were used to the media.

What I also said was that I was very concerned that, having suspended their participation at the provincial table, this greatly increased the probability of a strike in Durham, and that very much concerned me.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, the other side of the table has said you aren't serious about discussions and negotiations. That's very clear; that was in their memorandum.

1130

You keep saying you won't "negotiate in the media." Well, apparently you won't negotiate at all, and apparently a number of boards won't negotiate at all, along with your central bargaining. Your budget is already forcing other school boards to cut special education teachers. You're fast-tracking the closure of school community hubs right across this province, in as short as nine weeks.

Now, just weeks before graduation and prom, your years of financial mismanagement are coming back to haunt you, and the people who will suffer the most are the students and parents across this province. Because of your mismanagement of the economy, parents might not be able to see their child walk across the stage to graduate.

Minister, what are you going to say to those parents with this mess you've got on your hands with the fiscal mismanagement of this province?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Well, the first thing I would say to the member opposite, and to everyone in the province, is that I continue to believe that what we need are negotiated settlements. We have nine central tables. Discussions are currently ongoing at eight of those central tables. I fully anticipate that we will have discussions ongoing at nine of those central tables when we get over this "suspension," and that we will work very hard to negotiate collective agreements. And we will negotiate them at the table, because everything I've learned about collective bargaining over the years tells me that when you negotiate in the media, negotiations fail.

So our goal is to get to the table and to negotiate settlements, because negotiating is the way we deliver programs for students.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, last week, the Select Committee on

Sexual Violence and Harassment travelled to northern Ontario to hear first-hand from service providers and victims. During the meeting in Sioux Lookout, the committee heard a presentation from two RNs from the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre who expressed concerns over staff training within their assault care and treatment program.

Currently, there are only four full-time RNs hospital-wide qualified to provide care to sexual assault victims. In order to gain the proper skills, these nurses need to travel to urban settings like Toronto to complete the full forensic training. The RAO has stated that, in the past, when the programs were originally funded, they were monitored under priority programs at the ministry level, but they have since been transferred to the hospital, which is burdensome on their budgets.

Minister, will you commit to providing the necessary funding for training nurses, especially those in northern communities, so they can properly treat these victims?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question and the opportunity to respond.

I first want to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the important work that that committee, the committee on sexual violence and assault, is doing on behalf of all Ontarians. This is incredibly important work and we are all looking forward to the recommendations, as well as to implementing the important policies and procedures and systems that are required to backstop those recommendations. It's a very important issue to me personally—as well as, of course, as Minister of Health—and to the government as a whole.

Sexual violence and harassment are, unfortunately, a reality in every community in this province. We must continue to work hard to address it, fundamentally to prevent and stamp out sexual violence and assault where it occurs, but unfortunately, where it does occur, we need to respond in appropriate ways. The member opposite is reflecting one of the many ways that the province is involved in providing a response. I'm happy to address it specifically in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: These small, rural hospitals, especially those that are located in remote communities like Sioux Lookout, need dedicated funding to ensure that nurses have the proper training to care for victims of sexual assault, especially in the collection of the forensic evidence to prosecute the offenders. When evidence isn't collected in a timely manner, sexual assault charges can be thrown out by the court. In this case, with only four full-time RNs qualified to provide care, it can take anywhere from 24 to 72 hours before a victim may even be seen.

As hospitals work to balance their budgets, the sexual assault/domestic violence treatment centres have experienced deep program cuts. Minister, you can act today. Will you commit to the funding before the budget, so we can ensure the RNs in small rural hospitals, especially in northern Ontario, are able to receive this important training? Please, Minister, act today.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I thank the member for the question. This is a very important issue. In fact, the government currently funds 35 hospital-based sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres right across the province, including—I believe there are eight in northern Ontario specifically. These are centres that provide comprehensive and timely support to women, children and men who are victims and survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence.

All of these 35 centres across the province are staffed by health care professionals specially trained to deliver high-quality care. Evidence collection—all of those centres have access to rape kits and other processes that are required to collect and provide that evidence in a timely fashion, as the member opposite has indicated is so important. They also provide education to other health care providers and community agencies in the general public.

There is always, in everything we do as a province and as a government, more work to be done. I hear the specific question with regard to training from the member opposite. I will be following up.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Toby Barrett: Also to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: We have a problem in our riding. A Simcoe doctor is retiring with a roster of 4,600 patients and has no successor. This exacerbates an already fragile situation.

In June 2013, another example: A Port Dover physician with a roster of 2,000 retired, again without a replacement.

Over the years, I've met with a committee trying to build a new health centre in Port Dover. They're enthusiastic, but they need doctors. I wrote you on January 22, seeking possible solutions. I await a reply to that letter.

Minister, I'm asking: Could you provide us with some advice and some action to help our community down in Norfolk county attract physicians and also help attract physicians to other underserved areas?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It is a very important issue in terms of physician supply around this province. It can be challenging in certain parts of the province, more challenging than in others, to gain that supply of physicians that's so important to provide that primary care support to residents.

We have a number of initiatives that are under way—work by HealthForceOntario that specifically targets underserved and regularly serviced areas that are facing challenges with regard to physician supply. We also have a program called Health Care Connect that aims to attach unattached patients to new family doctors.

But it's important to recognize as well that we have made significant progress in this province in terms of attachment of patients. We now have about 94% of Ontarians who have a regular primary care provider—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —that's a physician, but it may also be another primary care provider. In the supplementary, I'll talk to other investments that we've made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Minister. There's a Norfolk General Hospital recruitment team and also this Port Dover committee.

One option, I feel, is that they need an empty family health organization to better enable them to attract doctors. I'm also told of a need for an additional health organization in west Norfolk, down in the Port Rowan and Delhi area.

Minister, you have indicated previously in question period that you would like to see more family health teams in small towns and in rural Ontario. However, I understand there is a cap, allowing something like only 20 new family doctors a month in the entire province. We graduate something like 500 a year from Ontario's medical schools. In the summer, I was in Norfolk; we need another 14 doctors, according to the formula.

My question, Minister: Why will you not create new family health teams or other empty family health organizations, for example?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know the member knows that I was born in Norfolk General Hospital, so this is a part of the province that I know very well, and he's acknowledging that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There's a plaque on the wall.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There's no plaque.

This is a very important issue. The fact is that, in the last 10 years—there are 2,300 more family doctors practising in this province than there were before. That's an almost 25% increase.

But there is still more work to be done. Nothing prevents family doctors, for example, if that's what we're talking about, from setting up shop anywhere in this province. They can do so through fee-for-service. They can create a family health group as well, where they can get together with other family doctors. They can work as locums as well. They can replace a retiring physician, for example, on a family health team.

1140

But also, we have allocated 20 spots per month for underserved areas around the province. We've specifically looked to our LHINs to identify, for the purpose of employing these family health team doctors, what parts of the province should be included. It may be that this part of Ontario is part of that designated area. We should know in the next several weeks.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Acting Premier: Acting Premier, earlier in question period, our leader asked you about what would be done with the proceeds of the sale of Hydro One. He pointed out very clearly that under the Electricity Act, the proceeds of that sale must go to the Ontario Electricity Financial Corp. in order to pay down the electricity debt in this province.

I'm going to ask you a very simple question: Do you intend to obey the law of the land here in the province of Ontario with respect to the disposition of those funds, or do you plan to break the law and put this burden onto the backs of the electricity consumers, who have already paid for that debt?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm also going to caution again: Going through to something unparliamentary also includes accusing someone of a criminal act. I'm going to offer him advice not to go down there again.

Please respond.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to restate the fact that we have worked extremely hard over the last 12 years in rebuilding the energy system in this province. A lot of concerted effort has been made in making sure that we have got the security of generation in our province and that we have a secure transmission and distribution system in our province.

We have worked hard in eliminating coal as a source of generating electricity in our province. In fact, we are extremely proud that we are the first province in North America to be able to do so. It's one of the single largest greenhouse gas emission-reduction projects, in fact, to the point that even the Conservative Prime Minister of this country is trying to take credit for that action, after opposing that decision again and again.

Speaker, not to mention—to ensure that we have renewable energy, we will continue to work on our energy sector to make sure that it meets the demands of our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I don't believe I got an answer there. But, Minister, it is not the responsibility of the electricity consumer in this province to bail you out of your financial mismanagement of the past 12 years. It is not their job to now pay for your infrastructure plans. They pay for the electricity system. Now that you've decided that you're going to sell off a portion of Hydro One, it is the law, under the Electricity Act, that that money must go to pay off the electricity debt. The money is not there for any other purpose.

I'll ask you in a different way: Will you stand in your place today and tell the people of Ontario that, as a minister of this crown, you will obey the law?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: This government—and the people of Ontario—has been working extremely hard over the last 12 years to clean up the mess that the party opposite left behind when they were in government. They are the ones who settled—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Break the law again and we'll have to bring in the OPP again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the party opposite saddened Ontario with a massive stranded hydro debt, which we have been paying year after year.

We've been very clear with the people of Ontario that our priority is to build Ontario up by investing in critical infrastructure in all our communities. In fact, I hear members opposite standing up all the time—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We hear members from the opposite party standing up all the time, asking for critical, important investment in our infrastructure. Be it our highways, our roads or our public transit, this government has ambitious plans. We're going to invest in our infrastructure to improve the quality of life for Ontarians.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for allocation of time on Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 17.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Hunter, Mitzie	Murray, Glen R.
Ballard, Chris	Jaczek, Helena	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kiwala, Sophie	Naqvi, Yasir
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Oraziotti, David
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Marie-France	Potts, Arthur
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Qaadri, Shafiq
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Rinaldi, Lou
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Sandals, Liz
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Sergio, Mario
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Vernile, Daiene
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Wong, Soo
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Nicholls, Rick
Barrett, Toby	Harris, Michael	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Dunlop, Garfield	MacLaren, Jack	Smith, Todd
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Norm	Walker, Bill
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 21.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I would like to introduce two of my three sons, who are here—Evan Martow and Mitch Martow—and my niece Ella Gladstone-Martow. I want to introduce my friend Esther Milstein, who is here with her mother, a Holocaust survivor, Genia Brykman; another Holocaust survivor, whose daughter Judy I'm friends with—Carmela Betel, and her friend Lucy Shaar; and we have children of Holocaust survivors: Howard Ganz, Mindy Ganz and Fay Ganz, as well as Marshal Cohen and Ari Gold. Thank you so much for coming.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL NURSES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the accomplishments of Mount Sinai Hospital nursing staff and the recent awarding of the designation of Magnet status for excellence in nursing and patient care.

Mount Sinai is the only hospital in Canada to be officially awarded this designation, which is granted by the American Nurses Credentialing Center. Magnet status recognizes health care organizations for quality patient care, nursing excellence, and innovations in professional nursing practice. To achieve it, the hospital must demonstrate strong leadership among its nursing staff, excellent interprofessional relationships among its health care team, and high levels of employee satisfaction, engagement and professional development.

I'm pleased to say that Mount Sinai not only achieved the required levels but in many areas surpassed the levels of other comparative Magnet organizations. For example, Mount Sinai had a significantly lower turnover rate than others, it had a higher average length of employment for its registered nurses, and a higher percentage of its nurses had graduate degrees.

This is a wonderful achievement and, in addition to being a great accomplishment and acknowledgment of the care that Mount Sinai provides, it is likely to have additional benefits, such as the attraction and retention of nurses who are keen to work in this type of professional environment.

I can't conclude my remarks without acknowledging Joseph Mapa, Mount Sinai's chief executive, and Mary Agnes Beduz, the vice-president of professional practice

and chief nurse executive at Mount Sinai. Mary Agnes, of course, is the mother of our former PC staff member Alex Beduz, who worked in this building for many years.

Congratulations to the wonderful nurses at Mount Sinai for a job very, very well done.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Cindy Forster: Today during question period, the Premier released the Clark report, which the government has been clear will form the basis of the province's fiscal framework, with implications for at least a generation. This report is the most significant shift in public service delivery in the last 25 years, and question period is the part of the parliamentary day when the government is held accountable for its administrative policies and the conduct of its ministers, both individually and collectively.

In his decision on the Magna budget, Speaker Carr warned about the dangers of circumventing the scrutiny of the Legislature. He said, "I have a lingering unease about the road we are going down, and my sense is that the House and the general public have the same unease.... It is one thing not to make the traditional budget speech in the House because the government is backed into such a decision by an ongoing House process, or a budget leak; it is quite another for the government to have a deliberate plan not to do so."

Obviously, this government learned from the Magna budget, but instead of respecting parliamentary process, it has done exactly what Carr feared: It establishes a new way to circumvent the checks and balances of this Legislature.

Speaker, it's a sad day for transparency and accountability in the province of Ontario.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Monte Kwinter: In a ceremony at Queen's Park later today, we will recognize and honour 12 Holocaust survivors whose stories of anguish, suffering and survival of both body and spirit are a testimony to the human will to live. These Holocaust survivors, who are in the House today, came to Ontario, rebuilt their lives and will be honoured for their wonderful contributions as citizens of Ontario. Those to be honoured are: Irving Bart, Sam Bart, Jan Blumenstein, Gitta Ganz, Dave Gold, Max Iland, Lore Jacobs, Martin Kulbak, George Landesman, Manny Langer, Norman Srebrolow and George Stern.

Today we recognize Yom ha-Shoah V'Hagvurah, Holocaust Memorial Day, a day designated for Holocaust remembrance in communities around the world. This is the 22nd year the Ontario Legislature has observed Holocaust Memorial Day. I'm proud to say that Ontario was the first jurisdiction in the world, outside of the state of Israel, to officially recognize it.

As we mourn the death of the six million victims, we also celebrate the lives of those who survived. I have visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and

museum in Jerusalem, several times. The memorial is dedicated to preserving the memory and the story of each of the six million people who died in the Holocaust. As a Jew, these memories strike the heart and the soul.

Every Jew is touched by the Holocaust. We lost loved ones, family members or friends. All members in the community lost someone. The Holocaust echoes through generations. The loss is extraordinary. At Yad Vashem, that loss is made real. It is concrete. You can touch it.

In the Valley of the Communities, you stand before wall after wall, carved out of solid rock, listing the names of more than 5,000 communities that lived, breathed, had life, in which men and women loved, married, raised children, worked, laughed and worshipped. Today, in most cases, nothing remains of these Jewish communities except for their names, forever frozen in the bedrock of Yad Vashem. It was there that I found the name of the city where my father was born, Czestochowa, and the city where my mother was born, Sosnowiec.

The Holocaust reaches out of the past and touches the shoulder of every Jew. For years, survivors walked among us with tattoos to mark the horror they lived through. Their stories, their scars and the numbers carved callously into their skins made the Holocaust real, personal and powerful for generations to come. There are fewer and fewer survivors still living. Fewer people are telling first-hand accounts of personal experiences. Soon the tattoos will be seen only in pictures, movies and museums while the stories slowly fade and with them the hard-learned lessons for those who survived, rebuilt and rose up.

The central theme of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2015 is "Seventy Years Since the End of the War: The Pain of Liberation and Rebuilding a Life."

The partisan Abba Kovner used to tell about a Jewish survivor whom he had met in Vilna when accompanying the liberating Soviet soldiers when they arrived to the destroyed ghetto. The woman and the little girl she carried in her arms hid in a small nook for almost a year, and with the liberation came out for the first time from their hiding place. Seeing her mother crying while telling her story for the first time, suddenly the girl asked in Yiddish, "Mother, are we allowed to cry already?"

Holocaust Memorial Day commemorates all who died in the Holocaust, not just Jews. We also remember those whom the Nazis targeted for their race, their religion, their politics, their disabilities or their sexual orientation. It's important to set aside time to remember all these victims whose lives were taken by the Nazis. In remembering, we bear witness to what these men, women and children endured.

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Tragically, other genocides have followed since World War II: in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. It's evident that we must continue our struggle to keep alive the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the United Nations 67 years ago in the shadow of the Holocaust. The declaration recognized the

inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace throughout the world. It called on the world to protect human rights by the rule of law.

We are indeed fortunate to live in Canada and in Ontario, but we must never take our good fortune for granted. We must guard our democratic institutions and democratic freedoms; we must appreciate, nurture and protect them; and we must constantly remind ourselves how easy it is to lose them.

On Sunday, April 19, 2015, at 11 a.m., a community Holocaust commemoration ceremony will take place at Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto, at 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, to commemorate the six million Jewish souls who perished in the Holocaust and to educate future generations of Canadians about the universal lessons of this dark period in history.

On Yom ha-Shoah, Jewish communities around the world recite a brief traditional mourner's prayer, the Kaddish. I want to continue our tradition of saying Kaddish in memory of those people whose *yahrzeit* is unknown. On behalf of the victims, the survivors and their families, I would like to recite that Hebrew prayer, which is something for which all people may pray. I ask for unanimous consent to allow me to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from York Centre has asked for unanimous consent to recite the prayer. Do we agree? Agreed.

I ask all members of the House to please stand while the member from York Centre recites the prayer.

Prayer in Hebrew.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: One line of this prayer translates, "He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us."

We must always remember so that the world will never forget. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member.

A gentle reminder that out of respect for the member and respect for the topic, I will be lenient with anyone who decides to speak on this topic in the normal time period that's allotted for members.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mrs. Gila Martow: I first want to welcome all the guests. Many Holocaust survivors are here today to hear us speak and to attend some memorial services. We had a beautiful reception, so I want to thank the organizers. Bonjour, bienvenue and, in Hebrew, bruchim ha-baim. Welcome.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I spoke on the Rwandan genocide as well as attending an event to raise awareness of the ongoing Yazidi genocide. Today, we commemorate yet another genocide, the over six million men, women and children who lost their lives for the simple fact that they were Jewish.

I am honoured by the presence of two Holocaust survivors and some of their friends and relatives today.

Carmela Betel, in the gallery, is a survivor who lost her husband, Joe Betel, last year. Joe accompanied the March of the Living youth groups and regularly spoke to high school students and other Simon Wiesenthal groups on his experiences surviving the Holocaust.

We are also joined by Genia Brykman, accompanied by her daughter Esther Milstein, who's a very close friend of mine. Genia is 91 years young and enjoys a very active life in the community—still driving. I told her, "Well, today, you missed one day at Yorkdale, Genia."

Esther and her husband, Harold, are the children of survivors. All four of their parents survived by living through unspeakable horrors from 1939 to 1945. The four survivors, their four parents, collectively lost 17 of their siblings, all their parents and grandparents and most of their extended family.

Mr. Speaker, I have twice visited Yad Vashem, a Jewish memorial and museum dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust, in Jerusalem. It is also a memorial and a museum to the righteous among the nations. Those are the people who acted to save Jewish lives, often at peril to themselves, and they often did pay the ultimate sacrifice. They were often squealed upon by their neighbours.

I want to just say that the museum's work is ongoing. I want to invite everybody here to visit the museum in Israel, to visit Israel and see the modern democratic state which remains a shining beacon of democracy in the Middle East.

The slaughter of the innocent reminds us of the evil that still exists in the world. Together we must work harder to ensure that "Never again" are more than just words.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today during question period, the Premier released the Clark report, which the government has been clear will form the basis of the province's fiscal framework with implications for at least a generation. This report is the most significant shift in public service delivery in the last 25 years, and question period is the part of the parliamentary day when the government is held accountable for its administrative policies and the conduct of its ministers, both individually and collectively.

In his decision on the Magna budget, Speaker Carr warned about the dangers of circumventing the scrutiny of the Legislature. He said, "If left unchallenged, will this incident not embolden future governments to create parallel, extra-parliamentary processes for other kinds of events that traditionally occur in the House?"

Obviously, this government learned from the Magna budget, but instead of respecting parliamentary process, it has done exactly what Carr feared: It established a new way to circumvent the checks and balances of this Legislature.

Speaker, this is a sad day for transparency and accountability in Ontario.

LEADING WOMEN, LEADING GIRLS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm proud to rise today to recognize the recipients of this year's Leading Women, Leading Girls, Building Communities awards. These awards acknowledge and celebrate women and girls who demonstrate exceptional leadership in improving the lives of others in their communities.

Recipients are individuals who break down barriers in the professional world and champion issues such as equality and healthy relationships. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, they provide positive examples to other women and girls in their communities.

Tonight, I will be recognizing 15 leading women and four leading girls in my riding of Scarborough–Agin-court, with the youngest recipient being 13 years old. Celebrating the 10th anniversary of these awards, it is inspiring to see the contributions of strong female leaders in our communities.

For example, 2013 Leading Girl recipient Alice Wang, the past president of the ACI business council, is now a second-year student at the Schulich School of Business. And 2012 Leading Women recipient Karen Peach, principal at David Lewis Public School, has been motivating girls to become leaders in their community throughout her 45 years with the Toronto District School Board.

Speaker, recognizing and encouraging women's leadership is an important step in building Ontario up and fostering an inclusive society.

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

Mr. Ted Arnott: It has now been over two years since the Liberal government agreed to transfer land to the federal government to create the Rouge National Urban Park, which would be the largest urban park in North America. The creation of the Rouge National Urban Park would provide strong protection measures for the land between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges moraine, as we know Parks Canada maintains high standards.

We also know that the Rouge National Urban Park would be protected by dedicated year-round park wardens. These wardens would ensure the ecological, environmental and cultural integrity of the park by enforcing rules against illegal dumping, poaching, polluting, hunting, vandalism and the theft of cultural artifacts—all issues that have plagued the park for many years.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Infrastructure is continuing to play politics with the Rouge park project. He's breaking the agreement and even using his recalcitrance as a Liberal fundraising strategy.

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By putting politics ahead of good policy, the minister is putting at risk almost \$144 million committed by the federal government for this initiative. This is money that would be used to protect the environmental integrity of

this land and ensure that the Rouge National Urban Park is enjoyed by the people of this province for decades to come.

Today we call upon the minister to stop playing games, stop delaying, find another issue to fundraise on and stop holding the Rouge park hostage. Let's instead take the next step forward and work together to create the greatest urban park in North America.

HOSPICE CARE

Mr. John Fraser: Today is Advance Care Planning Day across Canada, a day when those in the hospice and palliative care sector are urging Canadians to speak up and talk to their family and friends about their health care wishes and what they would want if they were unable to speak for themselves.

The end of life is not something that we often like to think about, and it's important that people have advance care plans so that they are more satisfied with the care they receive at the end of life. It is important that their loved ones will know and understand their wishes at a time that is very difficult.

Here in Ontario, we are fortunate to have excellent hospice palliative care, and we are working to grow our capacity to provide palliative care where and when it's needed. Hospice palliative care eases the pain and symptoms that accompany dying, and also the important social, spiritual and practical aspects of the end of life. Advance care planning is really about the things that are most important to us in life and at the end of life.

Today I am joining Hospice Palliative Care Ontario in urging everyone to speak up and talk about your thoughts and wishes for your care. Think about what's important to you. Learn about the kind of care that is available and what it can achieve. Talk about it with your loved ones so that they can understand your wishes. Decide on an alternative caregiver who can help you make decisions and speak for you if you can't speak for yourself. It's not an easy conversation, but having it in advance will make it easier for you and your loved ones at the end of life, a time to celebrate life and say our goodbyes.

SPEED SKATING

PATINAGE DE VITESSE

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On March 28, I was honoured to be at the opening ceremony of the speed skating provincial B and masters championships hosted by the Gloucester Concordes Speed Skating Club in my riding. The event took place at the Elizabeth Manley arena inside of the Bob MacQuarrie complex.

Un merci particulier à Janique Gagnon pour l'invitation et l'excellente organisation. I would also like to thank the volunteers who no doubt spent countless hours of their own time making this competition a reality.

It was an absolute privilege to be in the company of so many young skaters, 11 years and up, representing clubs

from all across Ontario. Seeing these young athletes so dedicated was impressive.

J'aimerais aussi souligner toute ma reconnaissance aux nombreux parents réunis en appui à leurs enfants. We cannot forget the sacrifices those families often make to bring their child to such a level of competition, and I thank all of them today.

I was also quite touched to personally meet Kevin Frost, an award-winning blind and deaf speed skater who has recently been invited to compete in the Blind Impaired World Cup in Scotland, and Ivanie Blondin, a 25-year-old who represented Canada in long-track speed skating at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Both of these determined and passionate athletes are inspiring and, I will say, are from the riding of Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say congratulations to all of the athletes competing on that day.

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

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Soo Wong: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

CURRICULUM

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas in 2010 the Ontario Liberal government promised to consult with voters before implementing a revised sex education curriculum which many parents felt was age-inappropriate and too explicit; and

“Whereas since 2010 the Ontario public has not been given adequate opportunity to provide feedback on proposed sex education changes; and

“Whereas in late October 2014 the Ontario Liberal government announced that more revisions to the sex

education curriculum would be implemented in time for the next school year; and

“Whereas the announced plans to consult only one hand-picked parent per school does not constitute broad public feedback on the curriculum, and therefore, the Ontario Liberal government is breaking its 2010 promise to consult the people of Ontario;

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

“Allow all residents of Ontario the opportunity to view and offer their response to proposed changes to the sex education component of the health and physical education curriculum.”

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

“Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

“Whereas Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder’ sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder’.”

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it to the Clerks’ table through page Ethan.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

“Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

“Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

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

“To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers.”

Speaker, I agree with this, will affix my signature and give it to page Megan.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by a great many people, not only in my riding, but from around the province, and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the purpose of Ontario's Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to 'provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.' RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

"Whereas 'all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.'—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

"That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario."

I affix my signature to do this, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for giving me the time to present it.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there is an estimated 208,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates emotional, social and economic burdens on the family and supports of those suffering with the disease—over 25% of those providing personal supports to survivors of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia are seniors;

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"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020; and

"Whereas Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia has not been revised since the implementation of a five-year strategy in 1999;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately review, revise and implement an updated, research-informed, comprehensive strategy to respond to and prepare for the rapidly growing needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Abdullah.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's entitled "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water," and it reads as follows:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

Speaker, I'm pleased to join with the Ontario Dental Association in supporting this petition. I sign it and send it down with page Colin.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Hydro One rates continue to rise; and

"Whereas the major costs on electricity bills are delivery charges, administrative and regulatory charges and the global adjustment, not the cost of energy consumed; and

"Whereas reliable and affordable power is a necessity for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the Auditor General showed that the debt retirement charge has collected more ratepayer funds than required to pay Ontario Hydro's residual stranded debt; and

"Whereas the smart meter initiative has been shown to be a waste of ratepayers' money and has caused ongoing

overbilling issues that have driven many families into financial hardship, such as the Maple Ridge Centre's \$25,000 bill following two years of Hydro's failure to send a single bill; and

"Whereas Hydro One insists on raiding Ontarians' bank accounts to pay for mistaken bills, and refuses to issue refunds as any law-abiding private business would have to; and

"Whereas the Liberal government's latest schemes of carbon taxes and selling parts of Hydro One without paying off the utility's debt will only cause bills to rise further;

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

"(1) To implement a standard delivery charge that reflects the cost of maintaining the electricity distribution and delivery system;

"(2) To immediately remove HST and the debt retirement charge on hydro bills;

"(3) To immediately give electricity consumers greater control over their billing and payment options;

"(4) To make Hydro One accountable to writing off consumers' unbilled usage older than 12 months;

"(5) To follow the law as stated in the Electricity Act and channel all proceeds of a Hydro One sale to paying off the utility's debt;

"(6) Cancel all proposed carbon tax and cap-and-trade plans."

I agree with this petition and will be passing it off to page Madison.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital."

I could not support this more. I will sign it and give it to page Ashton.

PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Il me fait plaisir de présenter l'élimination des microbilles des produits cosmétiques à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que les microbilles sont de petites particules de plastique de moins de 1 mm de diamètre, qui passent à travers nos systèmes de filtration de l'eau et sont présentes dans nos rivières et dans les Grands Lacs;

« Attendu que la présence de ces microbilles dans les Grands Lacs augmente et qu'elles contribuent à la pollution par le plastique de nos lacs et rivières d'eau douce;

« Attendu que la recherche scientifique et les données recueillies jusqu'à présent révèlent que les microbilles qui sont présentes dans notre système d'alimentation en eau stockent des toxines, que des organismes confondent

ces microbilles avec des aliments et que ces microbilles peuvent se retrouver dans notre chaîne alimentaire;

« Nous, les soussignés, présentons une pétition à l'Assemblée législative aux fins suivantes :

« Mandater le gouvernement de l'Ontario pour qu'il interdise la création et l'ajout de microbilles aux produits cosmétiques et à tous les autres produits de santé et de beauté connexes et demander au ministère de l'Environnement d'effectuer une étude annuelle des Grands Lacs pour analyser les eaux et déceler la présence de microbilles. »

Il me fait plaisir d'apposer ma signature à cette pétition et de la remettre à Ethan. Merci.

TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Stop the Carbon Tax" petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

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

"To abandon the idea of yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

This is signed by many people from my riding. I'll hand it to page Samantha.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to read a petition to the Legislature of Ontario that reads:

"Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex ... has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario” government “to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerks’ desk through Jae Min.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

“Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

“Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

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

“To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers.”

I agree with this, will affix my signature and give it to page Thomas.

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

“Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

“Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

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“Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

“Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

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

“To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research.”

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING PASSENGER SAFETY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA SÉCURITÉ DES PASSAGERS

Mr. Fraser moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 53, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to increase the penalty for transporting a passenger for compensation without a licence, permit or authorization / Projet de loi 53, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d’augmenter la pénalité prévue à l’égard du transport de passagers moyennant rémunération sans permis de conduire, certificat d’immatriculation ou autorisation.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it’s my privilege to stand in the House today to speak to the second reading of Bill 53, the Protecting Passenger Safety Act. C’est un privilège de prendre la parole ici aujourd’hui pour parler de la deuxième lecture du projet de loi 53, Loi de 2015 sur la protection de la sécurité des passagers. Ce projet de loi vise à protéger le public.

This bill is about protecting public safety. Public safety is something that I think we can all agree, as legislators, we have an obligation to protect. Governments regulate all forms of public transportation: airplanes, buses, shuttles and taxis. These regulations are primarily put in place to protect public safety.

Municipalities have the responsibility of regulating taxis. Taxis are a form of public transportation. Municipalities set up the requirements for regular vehicle and driver safety checks, in-car cameras, GPS and proper commercial insurance. Municipal regulations are enforced through the Highway Traffic Act.

The Protecting Passenger Safety Act proposes amendments to the Highway Traffic Act that would increase penalties for individuals who transport passengers for compensation without a licence, permit or authorization.

Bill 53 would increase the fines for those caught in violation of the act and proposes changes to include demerit-point penalties, a 30-day licence suspension for reoffenders and a 30-day vehicle impoundment for subsequent offences after a first conviction.

These changes are necessary to address a long-standing issue that the city of Ottawa and other municipalities across the province continue to struggle with. Illegal or bandit taxicabs pose significant risks to the safety of Ontarians, and the penalties that are currently in place are not providing our municipal partners with sufficient means to address this problem. The Protecting Passenger Safety Act is a direct response to these challenges.

This bill does not make anything illegal that is not already illegal. Cette loi ne rend rien illégal qui n'est pas déjà illégal. What it does is provide for more effective enforcement of regulations already in place.

After being approached by the city of Ottawa with their concerns about bandit cabs, I learned the difficulties that they have faced in their attempts at protecting the public from illegal cabs. Although Ottawa and most municipalities already have laws and standards that prohibit these activities, illegal taxicab drivers who may not have proper commercial insurance or have criminal record checks continue to break the law. By increasing penalties for illegal cabs, the Protecting Passenger Safety Act will provide municipalities with the enforcement tools they need to address the serious safety concerns surrounding bandit taxicab drivers.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that the member from Nepean–Carleton also introduced a bill that's very similar. I'd like to congratulate her on her work. Our bills are very close. I think it underlines the fact that this is an issue of public safety; it's not one of partisanship. I think it's something that we can all agree on.

Investigations in the city of Ottawa have uncovered a number of serious safety concerns relating to bandit taxicabs. As a note, I was talking to one of my colleagues here in the Legislature about the bill, and he said that the first time he arrived in Toronto at the airport, he got scooped. He got into a bandit taxicab and, by the time he got to his destination, the fare was \$20 higher than what they had agreed upon. That just underlines that this is something that can affect all sorts of people. When you're in a car and somebody else is driving, you're very vulnerable.

The city of Ottawa operated its first sting in 2006, which resulted in 100 charges laid against individuals operating bandit taxicabs. Subsequent stings have turned up an unlicensed driver who was consuming beer while driving and had a firearm in the trunk. They also found an unlicensed taxicab with no commercial insurance being driven by someone with a suspended licence. They have found unlicensed drivers, drivers with criminal records, drivers operating a vehicle under the influence of drugs or alcohol, drivers operating without car insurance, and drivers misleading vulnerable passengers with regard to the fares.

This is a tragic consequence of not being able to enforce the law: In September of last year, an Ottawa bandit taxicab driver was charged and convicted with sexual assault, forcible confinement and extortion. It was very tragic for the young lady who was involved in this. The police, at the time, were very concerned, and they're still concerned, that this person may have actually committed other crimes that they were not aware of. It cannot be said more plainly than this: That individual in question was using his illegal cab to trawl for vulnerable women to assault.

Unlicensed cabs put people at risk—most significantly, women, seniors and youth. You're very vulnerable in a car. I don't know if anybody is as old as I am, but if you remember hitchhiking or getting into a car with somebody you just met, you're not in control. You're very vulnerable, and I'd ask people to think of that if they've ever been in that situation.

Nous plaçons énormément de confiance dans les personnes qui nous fournissent les transports publics. Nous le faisons dans l'attente qu'elles respectent les règlements pratiques de la société, mis en place pour notre sécurité.

I'm an MPP, but I'm also a son, a husband, a father and a new grandfather. So what's important to me is that the car and driver that's taking my mom home from the pool when she's swimming in the morning, or my daughter home from the market on a Saturday night when she's out with their friends and they've been drinking, or taking my grandson to his first medical appointment—that someone impartial has checked that the driver and car are safe and that all those things that we put in place to protect people are there. That's part of what governments do: They regulate and provide oversight for all forms of public transportation. In my opinion, the regulations that are most important are the ones that protect public safety.

Il est bien évident qu'une amende de 300 \$ pour avoir exploité un taxi illégal ne dissuadera personne. Voilà pourquoi je propose une augmentation des pénalités. Ces pénalités devraient refléter l'importance du respect des règlements qui assurent la sécurité des passagers et des chauffeurs.

It's clear that a \$300 fine for operating an illegal taxi is not a deterrent, which is why I've proposed that the penalties be increased. These penalties need to reflect the importance of following the rules that protect the passenger and the driver.

Most municipalities have rules like regular vehicle safety checks; driver's licence, driving record and criminal record checks; in-car cameras and GPS; and proper commercial insurance, so that in the event of something happening, passengers are not left in legal limbo, often fighting in court for the very little or no compensation that they're entitled to.

Introducing demerit points and increasing fines provide a consequence that will underline the seriousness of the offence and the risk to public safety. Licence suspensions and vehicle impoundments will protect the public from reoffenders.

Bill 53 does not affect community services like Operation Red Nose or drives to medical appointments, nor does it affect carpooling. These activities are governed by a different set of rules and will not be affected by the changes in this bill.

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The Protecting Passenger Safety Act is just that: It's about protecting passenger safety and ensuring that our parents and our kids can travel in a hired taxi with the knowledge that they are protected. It's about stopping people who would use their car to prey on vulnerable people. Is there room for competition and innovation in this industry? Absolutely. But it must be done in a way that makes sure that public safety is first.

Increased safety and security for passengers and consumer choice are not mutually exclusive. Even the Competition Bureau, which regulates competition and encourages competition in Canada, said there is a need for regulation in this industry in a report written last fall.

I think that it's important to highlight again that this bill does not propose any rules that are not already in place. The things we are talking about, from operating a cab without a proper licence to driving without the required insurance, are already illegal. These standards are put in place to protect public safety, and it is reasonable to expect that everyone will follow them.

Bandit taxicabs are a serious and long-standing issue that needs to be addressed, especially in my community of Ottawa. Municipalities are asking for these changes, and we owe it to Ontarians to take action.

If you believe in public safety and the importance of ensuring that Ontarians can get into a cab knowing that proper checks have been in place, then you should support this bill.

J'encourage tous les membres de cette Chambre d'appuyer le projet de loi 53. J'attends avec impatience le débat.

I would urge all members of the House to support Bill 53, and I look forward to the debate.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I stand today to speak to Bill 53, the Protecting Passenger Safety Act, which increases penalties for those who operate bandit taxis. As the transportation critic for the Progressive Conservative Party, this is an issue that I have given a lot of consideration to, and I commend the member opposite for bringing attention to it.

In essence, this bill amends section 39.1 of the Highway Traffic Act and calls for increased penalties for the offence of picking up and transporting a passenger for compensation without the proper licence. In addition to increased fines, the bill adds three demerit points to the penalty and provides an officer with the ability to suspend a driver's licence and impound a vehicle for those charged with two such violations within five years.

I can sympathize with the member opposite, as I know bandit taxis are an issue in his riding. One of my fellow caucus mates, as the member opposite just recently

announced, the member for Nepean–Carleton, also introduced similar legislation to combat this issue in Ottawa. While I do support the intention to deal with bandit taxis, I would like to take a few minutes to highlight a couple of issues with Bill 53 specifically.

First, Bill 53 increases the penalties to a section of the HTA that I believe is worded too broadly. It seems that the wording is so broad that anybody who transports a family member or a friend and accepts gas money violates section 39 of the HTA, an issue that I feel we need to address before we go too far down this road.

Secondly, giving officers the ability to impound vehicles for a second offence is a potential Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms violation. In fact, your own Premier thinks so as well. In a letter addressing municipal requests for vehicle impoundments, sent from then-Minister of Transportation Kathleen Wynne to the city clerk and solicitor of Ottawa, she stated:

“With respect to the city's request that the province grant municipalities authority to impound vehicles known to be operating as bandit cabs.... Government legal counsel has advised that legislative amendments under the Highway Traffic Act to allow for vehicle impoundments to combat illegal taxis are not a viable solution. There exists the potential for violating the illegal search-and-seizure provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

Lastly, not only do I believe that Bill 53 fails to effectively deal with bandit taxis, but it also has the potential to limit the ability for innovative transportation network companies, such as Uber, to operate here in the province of Ontario.

For those who don't know, transportation network companies use smart phone technology to connect drivers, using their personal vehicles, with passengers in need of a ride. This practice, known as ride-sharing, has become very popular in numerous cities around the world, and especially here in Toronto.

While I appreciate the member opposite's suggestion that this bill will combat bandit taxis, it is hard to deny the potential effect in entrenching a competitive advantage held by traditional taxi companies from these new ride-sharing companies. On the day this bill went to first reading, for example, the Ottawa Citizen released an article: “Ottawa South MPP John Fraser Introduces Anti-Uber bill.” CTV News stated that, “Ottawa South Liberal MPP John Fraser introduced a private member's bill that would provide municipalities more enforcement tools to crack down on illegal cabs including Uber.” Clearly, this private member's bill may target transportation network companies like Uber.

Ride-sharing is an issue being debated around the world, as governments struggle to regulate this new technology. That's why I'm glad the member from Ottawa South has given us the opportunity to highlight the need to update our laws to accommodate innovative transportation network companies. In fact, I have used Uber many times, and I've always been very pleased with the service. While the benefits of ride-sharing technology are

clear to me, there are many out there who are still very skeptical.

Critics suggest that ride-sharing companies are a threat to public safety. They argue that registered taxi companies, due to government regulation, are safer than transportation network companies. However, Uber, for example, has demonstrated that even without government legislation, it is able to develop high safety standards. On top of the standard criminal background check, Uber drivers must provide a local police record check, as well. For sexual offences, DUIs or serious traffic violations, Uber drivers must provide all records, while taxis are limited to just the past five years. As well, Uber drivers are covered by a \$5-million insurance policy.

Further, Speaker, the quality of the drivers is enforced through user feedback. Riders are able to provide anonymous, real-time feedback on driver performance. This is an excellent system, as problems with drivers are identified immediately. It also incentivizes drivers to maintain a high level of service, since only drivers with high feedback ratings are able to participate in the ride-sharing network.

Again, my concern with today's bill is that it may be too wide a swing, when we intend to target bandit taxis and the series of issues surrounding them. Let me be clear: Bandit taxis with no background checks and insurance guarantees, and further concerns surrounding criminal issues like theft or sexual assault, do require attention. But while Bill 53 is touted to target bandit taxis, it could also target ride-sharing transportation network companies, and I submit that ride-sharing transportation network companies, in my experience, are not bandit taxis.

Ride-sharing technology means that there are no anonymous pickups. When you are hailing a taxi, there is no record of you being in that car, other than a potential credit card receipt. However, with ride-sharing technology, there is a digital footprint of your travel. The identity of your driver and where you are picked up and dropped off are all recorded.

Ride-sharing also removes the need for a cash transaction. When you leave the vehicle, an electronic payment is made from your account, and the driver is automatically paid. This improves customer experience and allows drivers to avoid the issue of fare jumping, where passengers exit the cab without paying.

I would also point out that, in terms of potential economic benefits, ride-sharing presents a unique opportunity to many car owners. Oftentimes, when people purchase a personal vehicle, it sits idle for the majority of the time. Ride-sharing allows vehicle owners the opportunity to make better use of the asset they already own. Given the flexible nature of ride-sharing networking, many are able to make extra money in their free time to supplement their income.

Transportation network companies have also developed what I believe to be a fair pricing system. Based on free market principles, ride-sharing companies operate on a dynamic pricing model where prices are high when

demand for drivers is also high, and prices are low when demand is low. While surge pricing can be an issue, riders have the choice of whether to accept or reject the higher prices and can even be notified when the rates return to normal.

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It is not only the consumer who benefits from ride-sharing, but governments as well, since it has the potential to reduce congestion and pollution in cities by increasing multiple occupancy rides and taking cars off the road.

Again, while I've just read through a long list of ride-sharing benefits that are attracting consumers across the globe, there are many detractors. That's why I feel it's important that we, as legislators, make sure we get this right when we step into rules, regulations and penalties surrounding these concerns. That's also why I feel we must ensure that when we are properly addressing bandit taxis, we don't use such a wide brush that we paint all ride-sharing transportation network providers into a corner as well.

Numerous jurisdictions have already embraced this new technology. In fact, Illinois recently tabled a bill that puts regulations on transportation network companies. The Transportation Network Providers Act sets a limit on the minimum amount of liability insurance for drivers, and ensures that drivers do not have significant driving infractions, have not been convicted of a crime in the past seven years, and are not listed on the National Sex Offender Public Registry database. It also compels transportation network companies to create a non-discrimination policy and a zero tolerance policy on the use of drugs or alcohol whereby the company will immediately suspend the driver's access to their digital platform and conduct an investigation into the reported incident. There are also regulations on how the transportation network companies charge their customers through their digital networks.

I think the Illinois example bears review and consideration. I would hope that part of the effect of the conversation we are having today is that we have more consideration of how we properly address transportation network providers. Consumers are driving this change, and government's responsibility is to modernize its laws to reflect the true progressive nature of its jurisdiction or province, like here in Ontario.

As I said earlier, I am very sympathetic to the member opposite's desire to combat bandit taxis; however, I do not believe, for the reasons that I mentioned previously, that transportation network company drivers fit the definition of bandit taxis.

Above all, I believe that this bill highlights the need to update our laws. Our entire economic system is based on the principle of competition. If taxicab companies want to develop software applications to compete with transportation network companies, they are free to do so. In fact, all three major taxi companies in my region of Waterloo have developed such apps. I believe that it is not the government's job to decide which technologies or companies thrive or fail.

To be clear, it is the consumer that is driving the expansion of transportation options, like Uber, that utilize advances in technology to provide a service that quite evidently people want. Ultimately, I cannot support a bill that I believe will not achieve its stated goal and may force new and innovative companies from Ontario. I believe it's important that, rather than turning our backs on an emerging reality, we have the conversations and work with transportation network companies like Uber to better ensure passenger safety and compliance with government regulation.

I appreciate the opportunity today to speak to Bill 53. I applaud the member for bringing forward his suggestions to deal with an issue, perhaps, in his community of Ottawa. But I also think there is an extreme need that we modernize our laws to reflect the reality of what's happening out there today and to reflect this consumer demand here in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my privilege, as always, to rise in this Legislature and speak to today's Bill 53, which is An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to increase the penalty for transporting a passenger for compensation without a licence, permit or authorization, also known as the Protecting Passenger Safety Act.

I would applaud the member from Ottawa South for bringing this forward, because certainly any opportunity that I have to talk about safety and regulation to protect Ontarians is an opportunity that I appreciate.

This particular bill, if we take a moment to look at what's in it, would increase the fines for drivers who transport passengers for a fee without legal authorization, which is contrary to the Highway Traffic Act. Also, it would increase the minimum fine from \$300 to \$500, and the maximum fine would increase from \$20,000 to \$30,000. This would affect the number of demerit points that the driver would be subject to, and there are also provisions for licence suspension and vehicle impoundment for repeat offenders.

The issues with this bill are in respect of consumer safety, privacy and labour laws and not any particular company or specific technology. This isn't about new technology versus old technology; it's about respecting safety, privacy and labour laws that protect passengers and drivers, those who would use the service and those who would drive next to someone using the service.

We believe in sensible regulation. This isn't the Wild West. These are our roads in our province, and sensible regulations are good for everyone. They uphold labour standards and consumer rights. They protect passenger and driver safety, and those sensible regulations ensure that taxi systems can function without constant conflict and chaos.

We do recognize that smart technology, mobile technology—mobile taxi apps—have enormous potential, and we should embrace that and welcome that. But we shouldn't cling to outdated rules that don't serve a valid purpose and that hold progress back.

Talking about progress, I'm reminded of a time when I was first in university. I remember not having too much money to afford the trips back and forth from home to school or visiting friends. I remember standing in front of that ride-share board in the university commons and trying to connect with someone else going the same way that I was and trying to find a ride. There's some inherent risk in that, and, as a student, sometimes you think you're invincible. You just assume that if someone posts an ad they must be someone just like you looking for a way to get home. We trusted that system, for better or for worse, and paid 20 bucks for gas or whatever, and you'd get home and we didn't think anything about it.

I think, in our society, we recognize that there are inherent risks in many of our systems. That wasn't a system that would necessarily require regulation, but that, back then, would have been the cutting-edge technology when it came to coordinating rides.

I had the opportunity, in my fine riding of Oshawa—we're home to the Spark Centre for Fuel Innovation, which is a fantastic place where ideas can spring forth and become real. One of those entrepreneurial ideas is for a company called Blancride. It's an app that coordinates individuals who say, "Hey, are you going my way?" It is a ride-sharing, carpooling—it's innovative. It's a system that we might be familiar with, but it's filling a need, and we do recognize that there is a need for people to coordinate, for things to be convenient. That's the world that we live in. We live in a technological society. We live in a society that wants convenience and wants great customer service immediately. Some of these innovative ideas are really worth embracing. However, we can't just throw caution to the wind, which brings us back to this bill.

As a female, I have travelled independently around this fair city and many others. I appreciate knowing that, whatever mode of transportation I'm taking, if it's a taxi or a ride with friends, I'm as safe as I can be on our roads. Our taxis currently are licensed. What that means is that I know that the driver has been screened, has been vetted, and I trust that.

A bandit cab makes me, on a personal level, quite nervous. I don't have any guarantees, and, as a consumer, I would like to have those guarantees. So when it comes to regulations and ensuring safety, I don't think that we can be too cautious.

1410

As I said, we support new technology and advancement, but we support safety and licensing and regulation of what is a blossoming industry.

Some of the issues surrounding insurance—that's something that we could talk about. I know, when I step into a licensed taxicab, that there is taxi driver insurance. However, if I'm stepping into an unregulated vehicle, I have no guarantees about that insurance.

I've got something to read from the Toronto Star. It's from an article: "Crash Leaves Toronto UberX Driver Confused About Insurance."

"Looking to make extra cash for a house down payment last fall, Waita Sindi became an UberX driver,

using his own car to pick up and deliver strangers to their destinations around Toronto....

“Last month, Sindi was cruising along Islington Ave. with three passengers when another motorist making a left-hand turn crashed into his 2005 Toyota Prius. Nobody was hurt.

“He notified Uber and ‘right away my app stopped working.’ A week after the accident, Sindi says, the only thing he received from the company was an emailed form asking for details about the crash.

“‘You’re kind of left wondering: What am I supposed to do, who am I supposed to contact, there’s no phone numbers—standard stuff, as you would with an insurance claim,’ he said in an interview....

“But the experience was stressful and left him with a lot of ‘what ifs’....

“The Insurance Bureau of Canada has warned people to be careful if they are using their vehicle as a cab but without commercial insurance.”

That’s on the driver side. If something, heaven forbid, happens and someone is killed in an accident, then what? If the insurance policy is “cross your fingers,” that’s unacceptable on our roads.

I’ve got lots of thoughts on this. Just let me find them.

We had introduced Uber into this conversation. Uber also believes it isn’t responsible for passenger safety. Uber Canada’s customers must—no, hold on.

Let’s go back to this: In April 2014, Uber introduced a safe-ride fee, which was adding \$1 to the fare to compensate Uber for the costs of performing background checks. This comes back to that passenger safety. Stepping into a vehicle that’s going to safely transport me from point A to point B, I would like to know who is driving, or know that that individual has been vetted, has been screened.

However, Uber has been lobbying governments to demand that background check regulations be weakened. That’s not the direction that we need to be going. We need to be going in a cautious direction.

As I said, customer-focused, convenience—this is the world that we live in, and we want to allow these technologies and innovative industries to grow, but we cannot throw caution to the wind, especially when we’re talking about safety.

I think I will leave it at that.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I’m honoured to speak on this bill, in my capacity as the member of provincial Parliament for Ottawa Centre.

Let me, first of all, thank my good friend and colleague the MPP for Ottawa South for championing and working on a very important issue. What he has put forward, through Bill 53, Protecting Passenger Safety Act—he has hit upon an issue that is extremely serious in our communities, and particularly in Ottawa.

Of course, I can speak more from an Ottawa perspective because that’s my home, where we are finding some serious incidents for some time. This is not a new phenomenon. This is not just happening a couple of years or

a year ago. This has been happening for some years, issues around bandit taxis, individuals who have their cars and are using them to transport people from one place to another for a fare, without any proper licence, without any proper security check and really, at the end of the day, preying on the vulnerable, primarily women, in many instances.

In the case of Ottawa, in the ByWard Market, we have heard of many instances where women have been endangered because of these bandit taxis.

This is an issue around public safety. This is an issue around road safety. This is an issue around making sure that our citizens—our duty is to protect them—are afforded the opportunity to be safe.

In many instances, we hail a taxi—all of us have probably used a taxi at some point—because we want to get from place A to place B in a safe manner. We have an element of trust when we get into that taxi, because we know there are clear markings, regulation around that taxi, and predictability around the fare and around the journey. Because we feel, for whatever reason, that when we may be out and have had one or two extra drinks and we should not be driving, which is a very important thing, and we encourage people to take taxis, or because of any other convenience factor—we need to make sure that when people get into taxis there is safety and security around that.

Unfortunately, we have had several instances in Ottawa—I stress, Speaker, that this is going back several years in our city—where people, primarily women, have been assaulted because they took a bandit taxi and didn’t know the difference, or people have been charged way more than what they had intended to pay, which obviously jeopardized the safety of those individuals. There have been issues around other criminal activities around these bandit taxis as well. I think that what my colleague and friend the MPP from Ottawa South is able to do is provide a really practical solution to deal with it.

The challenge is that right now the penalties that exist under the Highway Traffic Act are just designated as a mere cost of doing business. They are not sufficient. We need to make sure that that kind of illegal activity is properly targeted.

What this bill is proposing to do is increase fines to \$500 to \$30,000 per offence and add three demerit points, and also impose a 30-day licence suspension or vehicle impoundment for reoffenders. It’s a tangible way of ensuring that we stop this illegal activity and, most importantly, protect passengers who may take taxis for a variety of reasons.

I always remind people: You would never hitchhike. We always talk about never hitchhiking because of safety concerns. A lot of times, bandit taxis are almost a proposition of hitchhiking. We won’t do it in one instance; why would we allow it in any other instance?

My time is limited. I just want to thank the member from Ottawa South for his advocacy on this work. I think he has brought forward a practical bill. It will definitely help my community of Ottawa Centre in a significant

way in making sure that we protect passengers and our citizens. I urge all members to support Bill 53.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Just to weigh in on this for the few minutes that are left, we certainly had some discussion when we met to talk about this bill in our caucus. We wanted to actually ensure that this bill, as it goes through the committee process, isn't going to impact areas like volunteers for Cancer Care Ontario or volunteers for other kinds of agencies that provide travel support for patients who need to travel outside of their community or perhaps do not have any form of public transportation to get to those. Many of these volunteers receive remuneration to pay for their gas and their mileage, and we want to ensure that those services are still available in our communities.

The other issue that came up was students in rural and remote communities where they have to travel fairly long distances to get to university or college. One person has a car, and five kids throw him some money for gas. We want to ensure that there is an exemption for that kind of thing.

In my own community, certainly with the government allowing more and more privatization in health care, I know that as a regional councillor and a city councillor over the years, there were people at my council wanting to get into seniors' programs where they're driving seniors to the grocery store or to a medical appointment, and not wanting to pay that \$2,500 fee that's charged for them to be registered to actually carry passengers. I think it's something that we need to make sure doesn't slip in as part of this bill.

1420

The last piece that I wanted to speak to, as the labour critic, is the fact that with Uber—I know this bill isn't just about Uber, but it's about Uber and like kinds of businesses where people don't have the proper licensing or the proper insurance. But, in many cases, the people working for these companies barely make the minimum wage—although there are claims from these types of companies that their drivers, in New York, for example, make \$90,000 a year—and that these companies, because they're not registered, they're not licensed, they can fire their drivers without cause. There's evidence that this has happened; we've seen some articles in magazines about this.

We also need to be concerned that Uber drivers can have their personal information exposed to passengers, just as if they were in a regular taxicab.

Those are my comments. I've run out of time, but we'll certainly be supporting bringing the bill to committee.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: It does give me great pleasure to speak on behalf of my friend the member from Ottawa South's bill, the Protecting Passenger Safety Act.

For me, this bill is about safety, and I applaud you for bringing it forward—but it's safety in the context of oversight. We've had great discussion from the member

from Kitchener–Conestoga about the importance of and how the new technologies can be effective in making taxi services more affordable, more accessible and, in fact, safer in so many ways.

I think what's key in the discussion is the notion of what Uber is all about. If we think of what “über” actually means, it's German for “over,” as in oversight; or, as you may remember from Thus Spoke Zarathustra—Nietzsche's great treatises—we had the “Übermensch”, which roughly translates into “superman,” but it's really more of “overman.”

What we lack in so many of these situations with Uber is proper government oversight. What we're trying to do here is level the playing field, so that people who are getting into a cab on the street—we're trying to find enforcement for a regulated activity that isn't being fully enforced, a regulated activity which puts other drivers on an unlevel playing field. You know that these drivers are out there, and they're undercutting the marketplace because they're not putting in place proper licences, proper insurance and proper oversight.

I know in Toronto—I can't speak to the situation in Ottawa—what allows them to be able to do the same job cheaper is that it has so much to do with the costs of licences. We've created a scenario—a supply-managed system, in effect—where people have bought licences which makes the cost of taxi services so much higher. Until we figure out how to compensate people who invested their life savings in licences—in order to open up competition, people can undercut significant amounts of money by not paying insurance, not paying licences and not having proper oversight.

Although Uber can function using existing licensed drivers, it also operates with its own drivers. As we've heard from the member from—where is she from?

Ms. Soo Wong: Oshawa.

Mr. Arthur Potts: —Oshawa, she can't always be certain that person has entered into the proper oversight considerations.

I would urge all members to support the bill. It's an important bill for levelling the playing field for taxi services so that it can be provided in an equal way across the province.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise today to support my colleague from Ottawa South on this particular safety bill.

I heard, tentatively, during this whole debate, this issue of what they call illegal taxis, bandit cabs or ride-sharing services—call it whatever, Mr. Speaker, this is about public safety. That's number one. I want to applaud the member from Ottawa South for bringing this piece of legislation, because this is a long-standing, serious issue affecting municipalities across Ontario.

I want to share with the members here and those watching this debate today: On the actual website of the city of Toronto—they have actually stated on their website that, “Based on the information currently” provided, “the city is concerned that the UberX service may

pose serious safety risks to the public....” Now, why would the largest municipality in the province, in the country, put in that kind of statement if they don’t have the facts? That’s the first statement, Mr. Speaker.

The other piece here is that, recently, the Toronto police made at least 22 charges after a week-long undercover sting operation on unlicensed taxicabs—just one week on this concern about unlicensed taxicabs.

The other piece here is, we heard from our colleague from Oshawa of her express concerns dealing with the issue of safety as a woman getting in as a passenger. My other concern—as a former school board trustee with the Toronto District School Board, every day we put students into cabs. It is the responsibility of the school board, the principal and everyone involved to make sure the cab has proper licensing and that the taxi transporting the young person has proper mechanical inspections. So we’re going to go in potentially virgin territory, making sure the public is protected.

The other thing is, recently, city councillor Gord Perks wrote in the *Globe and Mail* identifying eight reasons why Toronto should not push for this kind of illegal taxi or bandit taxi. The number one concern he identified is the insurance issue. He listed a potential lawsuit in a case where, in San Francisco, a truck driver killed a child using Uber. The other piece he complained and wrote about in the article is driver screening, making sure about the background check of the driver.

The other thing, in his article in the *Globe and Mail*, Councillor Perks talked about is customer safety, because in the city of Toronto, the licensing body has a right to revoke or grant licences. When you have these kinds of drivers out there that are not properly licensed, not properly screened, you’re potentially putting every passenger—whether taking a ride in Scarborough, my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, or those taking a ride in Etobicoke.

At the end of the day, I think what the member from Ottawa South is saying is not only increasing fines but also the penalty of three demerit points, because often that demerit point removal—taking demerit points brings compliance with the law.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to speak in support of the bill.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to thank the members from Kitchener–Conestoga and Oshawa, the government House leader, the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, the member from Welland and the member from Beaches–East York. Thank you very much for your comments.

I would like to start by saying again that this bill does not make anything illegal that is not already illegal. So I appreciate the member from Welland’s concern. That was something I thought of when preparing this bill, so it won’t affect carpooling or charitable organizations that help people who can’t afford transportation.

To her comments on labour law, I’d like to add one more thing. There is an issue of fairness with people who

are already in the industry, following the rules, often working six, seven days a week, making a modest income, and they are disadvantaged. So there’s an issue. That’s not why I put this bill forward, but that’s an important thing for us to remember.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I would have said that, but I ran out of time.

Mr. John Fraser: I appreciate that, and I know that she would.

I really appreciated the comments from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. I want to let him know, with regard to his comments in the letter from our Premier, that he would want to know that the request that the city of Ottawa made was for all bylaw officers to implement the search-and-seizure provisions. I did not include that in my bill because I did not feel the risk to improper search and seizure would be appropriate—in allowing everybody to be able to do that. Properly trained police officers to enforce the law, the Highway Traffic Act, as they do now, is the best vehicle.

The member from Nepean–Carleton made that change in her bill. He may see that. She had the change that opened up the enforcement to all bylaw officers. I didn’t think that was appropriate.

I also want to assure him this bill is not about Uber, Hailo or Lyft, or new technology versus old technology. It’s about protecting public safety. It’s about those rules that we have in place that ensure that proper drivers’ checks and proper commercial insurance are there, and municipalities regulate that. The member may also know that the city of Toronto is undergoing a review of their taxi regulations; the city of Ottawa is, with regard to these new technologies.

1430

New technology and passenger safety are not mutually exclusive. Even the Competition Bureau, which wrote a report on this very issue, said there is a need for regulation in this industry. The regulations that are most important, which I believe they are referring to, are those that protect people. We would not expect to get on a plane that did not follow all government regulations.

I thank all the members for their comments, and I would appreciate their support at vote time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will take the vote on this item at the end of private members’ public business.

HOUSING SERVICES CORPORATION
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015
SUR LA RESPONSABILISATION
DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DES SERVICES
DE LOGEMENT

Mr. Hardeman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act to amend the Housing Services Act, 2011 and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996 /
Projet de loi 74, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2011 sur les

services de logement et la Loi de 1996 sur la divulgation des traitements dans le secteur public.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to bring forward the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act. There are 165,000 families waiting for social housing in Ontario. They cannot afford to have dollars intended for affordable housing wasted or misused, but for the past few years, that's exactly what has been happening.

Until a couple of months ago, most people had never even heard of the Housing Services Corp. It was created to save social housing providers money by arranging bulk purchases of natural gas and insurance. The goal was good, but since then, it has grown from two staff and a total operating budget of \$1 million, to an organization whose staffing budget alone was \$7.5 million in 2012.

Housing Services Corp. funds their operation by marking up the cost of natural gas and insurance to social housing providers. That means that every dollar they receive is public money that was intended to build, repair or operate social housing. As the HSC has grown, it has lost sight of why it was created and of the people it was supposed to help. Today, the Housing Services Corp. is costing many social housing providers money instead of helping them save it.

This bill would create accountability in three ways: It would allow social housing providers to purchase natural gas and insurance from wherever they can get the best price, instead of being required to buy it through the HSC; it would require the HSC to report salaries over \$100,000 on the sunshine list; and it would allow the provincial auditor to audit the HSC as she deems necessary.

The 165,000 families waiting for affordable housing don't care who made the rules 12 years ago. They care about the fact that this money is being wasted now, and they want us to fix it. They are watching to make sure we take steps to help them.

This is not about the needs of a few housing providers, as some people would say. Housing Services Corp. is costing social housing providers money across Ontario: north and south, large and small. Municipalities across the province passed resolutions in support, because they know first-hand how much HSC is costing them.

We know that Toronto Community Housing could save money if they were allowed to opt out, but so could Oxford county, Hastings county, Bruce county, and Prince Edward-Lennox and Addington. Thunder Bay reported that they spent an additional \$750,000 in the last four years because they had to purchase natural gas through the HSC. CityHousing Hamilton said they could save \$1.1 million in one year. That would have provided 140 families with housing. Oxford estimates they could save enough to house an additional 25 families each year.

The Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act would give housing providers the ability to purchase

natural gas and insurance at the best price. That could be from the HSC, in partnership with their municipality through AMO's Local Authority Services or directly. Whether it is gas or insurance, we need to ensure that housing providers aren't wasting scarce resources by paying too much.

There are already 100 housing providers in Ontario paying the HSC for the right to purchase the same insurance at less cost from another company. The only way that the HSC will let these providers opt out is if they pay HSC an administrative fee of 2.5% on their insurance premiums even though HSC isn't providing them any services. That means that their insurance business isn't required to make the bulk purchasing work, as the government would have us believe. For these housing providers, passing this bill simply means that they won't have to use some of their scarce resources to pay HSC for the right to buy from another company. Think how much housing could be provided if those 100 housing providers were simply allowed to purchase their insurance from the company that could provide them the best price.

The bill doesn't eliminate the Housing Services Corp. but it does ensure that they can no longer mark up costs to the housing providers to cover huge questionable investments and luxury world travel. Every dollar that the Housing Services Corp. spends comes from a housing provider who paid above the cost of services.

That means that social housing providers paid for the over \$82,000 that the Housing Services Corp.'s CEO spent on travel, including 10 trips he took to England. That means that they paid for him to fly back to Ontario for two days to attend his mother-in-law's birthday party before he flew back to England.

That means that social housing providers paid for the over \$1 million that HSC gave Innoserv, a solar panel company. In 2008, HSC gave Innoserv a loan of \$400,000 and wrote it off in the same year as uncollectible. Most of us, after writing the first loan off as uncollectible, would have stopped giving this company money, but two years later, HSC gave them another loan. This time it was \$330,000, and again they wrote it off in the same year as uncollectible. The next year, HSC gave them another loan which again was written off as uncollectible. There are a lot of questions about these loans, and unless the auditor investigates we may never know the answers.

What we do know is that one of the directors of Innoserv is now the chief executive officer at HSC's for-profit subsidiary which manages investments for Ontario housing providers. We know that every penny of the more than \$1 million that went to Innoserv Solar came from money intended to build, repair and operate social housing.

Just like social housing dollars, the HSC invested in a company called HS 497 Ltd., whose corporate address is a lawyer's office in Manchester, England. What makes it even more odd is that there are a number of companies listed at that address, including HS 630 Ltd., HS 462 Ltd.

and HS 571 Ltd. It appears that social housing dollars may have been invested in a numbered company in a foreign country with no explanation. We know that the CEO of the HSC was then listed as a director of the company for a few years, but there is no evidence that the company ever operated.

I'd like to ask the government again: What was HS 497? Where did the housing money go? If we can't answer those questions, then I hope the government members will be supporting this bill so the auditor can get the answers for us, for the taxpayers and for the people waiting for affordable housing. The government would tell us that they are conducting a review, and I look forward to reading it. I hope and expect that they will make it public.

What they won't tell you is that the scope of the review was limited. For instance, it only goes back two years. That means it won't look at Innoserv or HS 497. It won't find out what happened and it won't look at whether there's any way to get even part of that money back to help Ontario families who need affordable housing.

The only way we can get the answers that the people of Ontario deserve is by ensuring that the Provincial Auditor can investigate. The auditor has the expertise to look into these investments, to evaluate the bulk buying and make sure that no public dollars are being wasted or abused.

The auditor's office had experience unravelling for-profit subsidiaries when they were investigating the Ornge air ambulance service. Unfortunately, there are a lot of similarities between the two organizations. Housing Services Corp. may be Ornge 2.0. That's why we need to increase accountability and we need to give the auditor the authority to investigate.

Incidentally, this is not the first corporation of this type to have oversight from the auditor. In fact, when the current Minister of Municipal Affairs was Minister of Consumer Services in 2009, he was responsible for legislation that gave the Provincial Auditor the right to audit the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. When he described the auditor's oversight on third reading, the minister said, "Transparency and accountability, straight up." I want to commend him for increasing that oversight. It was the legislation that we used to model the bill that we have here today to give the auditor oversight over the Housing Services Corp.

1440

As you know, the TSSA's structure is similar to the HSC. It's a non-profit corporation, not a government agency, and the majority of the board are not appointed by the province. But, Speaker, unlike the TSSA, which is funded by the industry, the money that the Housing Services Corp. spends is public money. It doesn't come from the private sector. It's federal, provincial and municipal tax dollars that were intended for social housing. But there's a loophole that allows HSC not to have the same level of accountability because the tax dollars go to the housing providers who then are required to pay the Housing Services Corp.

In fact, the housing providers who are forced to pay the Housing Services Corp. are public organizations required to report for the sunshine list. Ajax Municipal Housing Corp., Brantford's municipal housing corporation, Kingston and Frontenac, Cornwall and Area Housing Corp., Halton Community Housing Corp.: These all are organizations that are required to report on the sunshine list. These are the organizations that are being overcharged by the HSC so they are spending the same public money. The big difference is that at the housing organizations I listed, there wasn't one person on the list, because none of them were earning over \$100,000; not one. Today, we have an opportunity to close that loophole and make the Housing Services Corp. more accountable by requiring them to report all salaries over \$100,000.

Taxpayers depend on us making sure their money is spent wisely. Frankly, it's hard to believe some of the ways that Housing Services Corp. has spent this money. It's also hard to believe that no one noticed. But today we have an opportunity to ensure that it never happens in the future. We have an opportunity to increase accountability and transparency "straight up," as the minister said, and we have an opportunity to put the needs of 160,000 families who need affordable housing before party politics.

I hope all members will support this bill to ensure that social housing dollars go to help vulnerable people and not to the jet-setting people at the Housing Services Corp.; that they all go to house people in our public housing system. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up in support of the member from Oxford's private member's bill, Bill 74, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act. His comments, of course, ring very true, and I think that he has a record in this House of bringing forward private member's bills that should receive support from all parties. I'm thinking of his carbon monoxide bill, which finally did pass last session.

It's true that this government has a long-standing record of trying to outsource their responsibilities, and I think that the Housing Services Corp. is probably a perfect example and one that this government should learn from. But of course the intention of the bill, and the act, subjects the Housing Services Corp. and its subsidiaries to the oversight of the Auditor General and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act. Also, housing service providers will no longer be forced to participate in Housing Services Corp. programs. I think that they would welcome that relief. This is something that the clients, those who are part of public housing, have been calling for: a serious reform at the top, where the money seems to go, for a long time. So this bill is timely and it is needed.

I do think that we need some context here, just to remember our history. The Housing Services Corp. of course is a non-profit, private corporation, and it was

originally created as the Social Housing Services Corp. by the Tories at the same time that they effectively killed the Ontario Housing Corp. and downloaded social housing onto municipal service managers. That is the history. So I kind of see this as a way of correcting that wrong: to at least put the oversight, which is desperately needed, into this stand-alone agency.

But that is the problem: This is not truly a crown agency, and therefore it's not subject to the normal oversight of the Legislative Assembly, the Ontario Ombudsman or the Auditor General, and that is needed. One would have thought that that would have been built in at the very time, but if it's arm's-length and it's over there and it is doing what it wants to do, then it is very easy for the government to sort of leave their own responsibility out of it.

Today, of course, the talk is, everyone wants to apply for the beer ombudsman in the province of Ontario, given the announcement this morning. That's what all the interviews—there are a lot of people out there who would like to be in charge of beer in the province of Ontario; I can tell you that much.

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's like winning the lottery.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's right.

We are also standing in this place right now because of a long-standing Liberal record, which is not a very good record, on housing. One has to remember that in the 2007 budget, the Liberal government announced that "the province will take responsibility for social assistance and social housing costs currently funded under the program." However, in 2008, the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review around the municipal uploading agreement did not announce an uploading of social housing costs. They forgot that part.

In 2010, the government's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy said it was "short-sighted" for the Harris government to download housing programs onto municipalities. Many municipalities had expected that social housing costs would be uploaded eventually.

In 2012, the provincial government eliminated the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit, the CSUMB, and folded it into a new program called the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. We call it CHPI. The effects of this change in 2012 are still being felt in our communities, because CSUMB was a fund that was used in particular by women who were fleeing family violence, domestic violence. This allowed them to actually get to a safe place with their children. We've been trying to get this reinstated for quite some time. But the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, CHPI, was started up with less funding. Funding for municipalities under the CHPI is capped, and it's not demand-based, and that's a really important piece. So it's not responsive to the actual needs of housing or needs around homelessness. Unlike the CSUMB, CHPI benefits are discretionary, and people cannot appeal a denial of benefits to the Social Benefits Tribunal, so they have no recourse. There is truly no accountability.

The government recently announced a two-year funding freeze of CHPI, and the Star actually reported this as

"good news," because the government cynically announced the freeze as if it was new money, something we're seeing often in this House. That is quite sad, because housing is that base that you rebuild an economy from. As I mentioned, it has social value and economic value to the broader community.

In 2013, the Wynne government announced the cancellation of the Toronto pooling compensation, which helped the city of Toronto pay for part of its disproportionate social housing burden. This completed the 100% downloading of social housing programs onto municipalities. This cut left an \$86-million hole in Toronto's budget in 2015, rising to \$129 million next year. Next year, the provincial government will contribute less funding for Toronto's housing and homelessness programs than the Harper government, completing the theme of the hard-right turn at Queen's Park.

We have actually proposed several progressive and positive solutions to the social housing crisis, such as inclusionary zoning and equal rent protections for all tenants. These have firmly been shut down by this government.

There are so many examples to list, actually, as to why this financial and Auditor General oversight is needed.

I'll just leave you with one most recent one. Last November, just a few short months ago, Housing Minister Ted McMeekin wrote to the agency to demand answers after learning that former HSC CEO Lindsey Reed was paid \$262,000 in 2013 for severance, unused vacation time and salary for the four months she worked in that year. After leaving, she continued to work for the agency as a special adviser for HSC, earning nearly \$52,000.

Boy, you know, where are all these jobs, and how do I get one? It's unbelievable. There are so many examples of incompetence.

I want to let my colleagues weigh in on this issue, but we will be supporting this private member's bill. We commend the member for bringing it forward.

It is high time that this agency, the Housing Services Corp., has the financial oversight to make sure that it operates in the best needs of the clients and not the people who are running that organization.

1450

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise in the Legislature this afternoon to speak to Bill 74, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act. I want to thank the member from Oxford for a sincere and well-intentioned private member's bill that wants to address some issues that I think all members of the Legislature have about the way this corporation has managed itself.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo also gave a good summary of sort of the inception of the HSC and how, perhaps, some of what we're now looking at has occurred.

This corporation, though, is an independent non-profit corporation. It is not directly funded by the province of Ontario. It does not receive provincial funding. That is

one of the reasons why it is not subject to the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act that we already have—and also the board of directors of this corporation, the majority of which are not appointed by the province. It was set up to be quite arm's-length from the province, and that is how it's operated.

This corporation, however, does have to provide an annual report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, with audited financial statements, within 180 days of the end of its fiscal year. As part of its commitment to be more open, transparent and accountable, the corporation did ask the ministry to help facilitate an independent third-party review of itself and its subsidiaries. That was selected through a competitive process.

This review is under way, and it's expected that it will be completed later this spring. As we've heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs in this House on several occasions now, the minister is very committed to seeing that review through, and he's awaiting the results of that review.

There have been some steps taken to ensure the accountability and transparency of this organization and how its funds are being utilized. The member from Oxford raised concerns over this exclusion from the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, and I think they're very legitimate concerns. An agency, whether it's directly under the control of the province, but nonetheless an agency that does provide services to the public—there is cause to want there to be openness and transparency, and for the public to realize how that organization is managed, what kinds of salaries the senior staff there have and whether there is value for money for what is paid for. So there is no argument from me or, I think, from anybody on this side of the House that the concerns that the member from Oxford raises aren't reasonable ones to have and which we may well need to address.

But the public policy purpose of the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act is to deal with those agencies, those ministries, those organizations that are directly related to the province, and this is not one of them. I think there are steps being taken to increase the transparency there.

As I've said, we await the results of the review that is being undertaken this spring. I'll be supporting this bill today, but in the future, I'll be anxiously awaiting the results of that review so that we know what further steps we should be taking.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate today on Bill 74, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act.

I think it's necessary to do a bit of a timeline here to understand what the original situation was, how we got to where we are today and the need for some legislative scrutiny.

The notion of this organization was based on the advantages of bulk purchasing for both gas and insurance services. At the time when it was set up it had two

employees. It gives you a sense of what the expectation was in terms of how their job could be completed appropriately in that kind of environment. If we fast-forward to today, it's a very different picture. What we see is a complete lack of oversight and what could go wrong with the simple idea of the benefits of bulk purchasing, which, quite frankly, is something that many of us are aware of in our own daily lives, and certainly in commercial activity as well. When we come to today we see an entirely different picture: We have a CEO who became the CEO in 2013 after having had a combined salary of \$288,000 and \$116,000; this would be Mr. Wong. And the previous CEO resigned with \$262,000. That gives you kind of a startling reaction or picture to the one where you had two employees starting out.

What this also tells us, when we drill down, is how the concept of the bulk buying, and therefore the economy of scale, has in fact gone completely the other way. I'm only going to use three examples of how it's gone the other way. When we look, for instance, at the reality, on the one side, of 165,000 people waiting for housing, we have examples of Hamilton having to pay \$1.1 million more for gas because of the manner in which this HSC operated; Peel region, \$200,000; Thunder Bay, \$750,000. Just taking Hamilton's alone would provide shelter, housing for 140 families. It gives you some idea of the manner in which these things have deteriorated, I would say, as a result of the lack of appropriate oversight.

I want to finish my comments by talking about my own riding, where I would say that the issue around housing is one that comes up frequently—people who have their own housing recognizing the urgent need for those who do not. When people see this lack of oversight—and there are many examples of further inappropriate spending practices and investment practices—it deludes them about the whole process. It makes them very cynical. It also makes them—when people say, “Oh well, it's not at arm's length,” that's legal inside baseball. All they want is the political will to create a system that works for everyone, that works for taxpayers paying the bill, that works for people who are waiting for housing.

We all have to look at how this got to be and how there has to be the political will to fix it and restore people's confidence in the integrity of our systems.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and add some comments to everything that's been shared in this chamber so far. I'm not going to go too far in depth. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo did a pretty good summary of many of the points around the Housing Services Corp. and some of the issues faced through that particular organization.

1500

Going through notes, something that has come top of mind for me—representing the riding of Windsor West, we're a very diverse community. I represent an area that has a lot of middle-income earners, middle-class families. I also have some areas that are much more affluent

neighbourhoods, and then I have a few areas that are greatly represented by low-income families, many who are immigrants who choose to come to not just this province but to make their home in Windsor. They start very humbly when they first come over.

When we're talking about social housing, we're talking about affordability. I'm going through notes, and something that stands out to me is that there's no oversight with the Housing Services Corp., and this bill set out to change that. There definitely needs to be oversight when we're talking about the use of public funds that are meant to benefit the general public, especially those who are marginalized.

I'm just looking through some notes about some of the business dealings of this particular corporation. I see that they were charging broker fees and collecting money for the corporation that way.

We had a CEO who claimed expenses of more than \$100,000 between January 2012 and September 2013. Shockingly, these expenses weren't legitimate expenses. They were for alcohol, high-end dining, and frequent travel. These are luxuries that people who access social housing—these are luxuries that they don't have access to, and it's shocking that somebody who is supposed to be running an organization, looking after the best interests of these people, is actually wasting taxpayers' dollars on things such as alcohol and personal travel, not legitimate travel.

The CEO had claimed that the wining and dining expenses were part of what was required in business hospitality—necessary in order to sign up insurance underwriters. Despite all the travel, HSC's rates were still more expensive for many housing service providers than what a municipal staffer could get by picking up the phone. Again, these were not legitimate expenses, and these were expenses that came with a very hefty price to the people this person was meant to serve.

I also notice that we had a board member who was appointed by Mayor Rob Ford here in Toronto during a shakeup of the Toronto Community Housing Corp. In 2013, it was revealed that this particular board member was receiving below-market rent from the Greenwin-Verdiroc group, a property management company that managed buildings for the TCHC. A few weeks after this was reported on CBC, this individual resigned but, in December 2014, under a new mayor, the city reappointed this particular person. Again, we have someone who is abusing the opportunity they have to take care of people who are of low income and who depend on them to look out for their best interests.

Again, I won't take too much time to speak to this. I know that the member from Oshawa has some comments as well. I think it's really important that there's oversight for these organizations that are supposed to be looking out for taxpayers.

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

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm happy to rise today to discuss the bill introduced by my colleague across the

aisle, the member for Oxford, about the act to amend the Housing Services Act and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act.

Speaking on this bill gives me the opportunity to discuss the role of the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act. I'm pleased to be able to consider its purpose here today in the House, and I thank the member for introducing this bill.

The PSSDA was introduced in 1996 to increase transparency and accountability in terms of public expenditures in our province, and it does so by providing information to Ontarians about how their tax dollars are spent and how public money is allocated amongst the relatively highly paid public workers who earn over \$100,000.

This government is strongly dedicated to the assurance of transparency and accountability in how public money is spent, and it is committed to openness.

The Housing Services Corp., or HSC, was originally established under the Social Housing Reform Act, and continued under the Housing Services Act as a strategy of downloading the responsibility for social housing to municipalities. The HSC is an important part of the affordable housing strategy in this province, and has been given a mandate with an eye to creating efficiencies, keeping costs down and ensuring accessibility. Within the HSC, service managers have mandates to provide citizens in their respective municipalities with affordable housing. The service managers are also tasked with purchasing services in bulk so as to reduce the overall costs of social housing.

I understand there has been some attention to accountability within the HSC, and this, of course, is a subject that this government welcomes discussion on. The fact is that the HSC does not qualify as being subject to the sunshine list under the PSSDA; it's not one of the organizations that falls under the PSSDA.

In order to be subject to public salary disclosure under the PSSDA, the clearly outlined criteria state that: over 50% of the board or an organization must be appointed by the province; that it be a type of organization as outlined in the PSSDA, for example, a crown agency; or that it receive \$1 million or more in funding from the province within the span of one calendar year.

Speaker, the HSC simply does not meet these criteria. Only two board members out of a total of 15 are appointed by the province, it's not a crown agency and the HSC has received no funding from the province since 2011. Therefore, under our current understanding of the salaries that should be reported under the PSSDA, the HSC simply doesn't qualify at this time.

As I've said, this government is committed to transparency. This dedication extends to the HSC. The HSC is required to submit a report to the Minister of Housing after each fiscal year, and this includes audited financial statements. The Housing Services Act, 2011, included greater transparency measures within the HSC than had been previously in place. It did so by requiring the HSC annual reports to the minister to report on some salaries

and expenses. Now the HSC even publishes some of its expenses on the website.

The HSC is attempting at this time to create more transparency within the corporation. It has asked the ministry to help to carry out an independent third-party review in order to ensure that this transparency is upheld. This review is currently in process, and it would be rash, at this time, to consider amending legislation before the independent review process is complete.

I thank the member for Oxford for introducing the bill and for his devotion to accountability in this province.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'd just like to be on record as saying that the HSC really is another Ornge; it's another private corporation, not transparent or accountable. So we're pleased to have proposed oversight.

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill today. As I think about this bill, I think about a couple of things.

First, I think about the importance of housing, how much work this government has done on that file and how much more work remains to be done. I remember, the first two weeks after being elected for the first time, meeting with a number of constituents. One of the constituents was a senior who had been struggling to find housing. Hearing her story, and the stories of others since, helped reinforce how important the housing issue is and how important it is that we do what we can to support those folks who need a roof over their heads. I know that this government is committed to that. I know that this government has been committed to that over the course of years and has invested significant sums of money in housing to do just that.

The other thing that I think about, when I think about this bill, is accountability. When I think about the time leading up to the election and the time since, in the interactions I have—the meetings with my constituents in Etobicoke Centre on a weekly basis—one of the issues that comes up a lot is the issue of accountability, the issue of making sure that we're spending tax dollars wisely. As someone who comes from a business background, this is one of the things I have tried to bring to government: some experience in making sure that—my previous experience was in helping companies to manage their money, to invest their money wisely, to make sure that they were getting an effective return on that money and delivering services to their customers. I've tried to bring that to government in my role on finance committee, in my role on Treasury Board and in my role in helping Minister Matthews in passing Bill 8.

1510

When I think about this particular bill, I think about what the role of the Housing Services Corp. is. It's an independent corporation; it's not a crown corporation. Therefore, it falls outside of the salary disclosure legislation that's currently in place. What we've seen is

action taken to make sure that there is a review, and the ministry is facilitating an independent third-party review of the HSC. It would be premature to act to pass this bill in light of the fact that that review is ongoing.

There are many considerations that need to be thought of when we think about how we make sure that as much money as possible goes to the people who need it, who are the people we're all trying to help: those folks who need a roof over their heads—that senior who came to see me a few weeks into my term in Etobicoke Centre. There are many, many considerations, and that review will allow those considerations to be weighed.

I guess I would also say that there were a few comments made about the government's support for and work on accountability and transparency. Having been the parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board, having worked to pass Bill 8, broad-ranging legislation that increases accountability and transparency and will increase value for money in our government, I think our government has been very strong on that. We should allow the review to be completed before taking action, but I do look forward to seeing that review to make sure the value for dollar is—

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: —and those people who need a roof over their heads have it.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I want to thank my colleague from Oxford for bringing forth this timely piece of legislation to address the very concerning issue and costly reports regarding the Ontario Housing Services Corp.'s practice of funneling money from local housing providers under the guise of bulk insurance and natural gas purchases.

As we've heard, if passed, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act will finally put an end to the waste and misuse of public money that was intended to build, repair and operate social housing in Ontario. We've heard the member from Oxford spell out the details of the waste and misuse of public money that has seen local providers over and over again being forced to pay higher prices for insurance and natural gas through the HSC than they would otherwise pay local providers.

Throughout Ontario, there are numerous examples of how much extra the HSC is costing our housing providers. In one year, CityHousing Hamilton reported spending \$1.1 million more for gas through the HSC. Peel region reported they paid an additional \$200,000 for gas in one year because they had to purchase it through the HSC. Thunder Bay district social services board reported that they paid an additional \$750,000 for natural gas over four years due to the HSC.

The most frustrating part of it all is that while these extra costs are adding up, there is a growing waiting list of 165,000 families and counting for social housing—unbelievable—while the providers aren't allowed to escape the HSC trap, as they are legislatively required to

play along, unless they pay the HSC a fee equal to 2.5% of their insurance premium. Where I come from, Speaker, people call that highway robbery.

We have seen this sad, sorry tale play out at Waterloo Region Housing. In fact, they paid HSC an extra \$20,000 for insurance over two years. That won't be the case this year as the region has agreed to pay the HSC opt-out fine to be able to go with its own provider. Here's the bottom line: Even with the 2.5% fee, amounting to \$10,462, including HST, even with the added cost, the region will see a savings of close to \$6,000 by escaping out from under the shadow of the HSC bulk insurance scheme. That's \$6,000 more that our local housing providers can use to help needy families get off waiting lists and into housing.

Again, we have over 165,000 families on waiting lists for social housing. I want to thank the member for Oxford for stepping in to help them with this bill that would allow social housing providers to purchase natural gas and insurance at the best price rather than being forced to purchase them through HSC.

Further, this act would allow the Provincial Auditor to investigate HSC and require it to report salaries on the sunshine list, following some concerning reports on what local providers' extra costs are paying for. Soon after learning that a former HSC CEO was paid \$265,000 for only four months of work, it was revealed that the current CEO, Howie Wong, expensed \$80,000 for international flights, hotels and meals over three years. I know those 165,000 families could have benefited from those funds being spent on housing.

So, again, this is timely legislation that I will be supporting, and I'm hopeful that government members will follow suit to ensure local housing providers can better serve their clients and that housing dollars are actually spent on housing our families that are in need.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to stand today and speak to Bill 74, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act, which was introduced by my good friend and colleague the member from Oxford.

Affordable housing plays a vital role in many communities across the province, as we all know how important it is to protect our most vulnerable citizens. The average wait for a rent-geared-to-income unit in Ontario is almost four years, but in some communities households can wait almost 10 years before being offered an affordable home. I know that in areas in my riding, in Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton, it's certainly over four years, but not quite 10 years.

The waiting list is quite unacceptable, but it has grown by 40,000, to 165,000 families, under this government, making it more important than ever to ensure dollars intended for affordable housing aren't wasted or misused. Sadly, this has not been the case under this government. Affordable housing providers in Ontario are required by the Housing Services Act, 2011, to buy natural gas and insurance through the Housing Services Corp. While the

goal was to create bulk purchasing discounts, the HSC is now charging housing providers much more than if they were to purchase these items directly, while also spending money on international travel, questionable contracts for board members, and giving money to for-profit companies.

I know that week after week, my colleague from Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, has stood in the House and questioned the minister on a number of the scandals taking place at the Housing Services Corp. Most of them have been mentioned here today: unneeded expenses that at the end of the day have taken money away from the most vulnerable people who need to be provided housing. Just like we've seen with past scandals under this government, there's little accountability and no respect for taxpayers' money from the Housing Services Corp. All this comes at great cost to our municipalities, which need more support than ever.

I want to mention one example: The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, which represents the majority of my riding, did a direct comparison for the 2009 to 2012 time period and demonstrated that the natural gas rates per cubic metre offered by the local authority services are considerably lower—up to 21%—than those offered by HSC. So they could be saving up to 21% if they did not have this law. In Bruce county, the housing authority had to buy refrigerators, most of which were certainly used and needed service.

Bill 74 is intended to save affordable housing providers money on natural gas and insurance by removing the mandatory requirement to purchase them through the Housing Services Corp.—and for the provincial Auditor General to audit the Housing Services Corp. is a reasonable request. I hope we get all-party support on this today.

I just want to mention some municipalities that we have received support from so far for the member from Oxford's bill: the town of Rainy River, city of Owen Sound, township of Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands, township of Alfred and Plantagenet, township of Faraday, township of Wainfleet, township of Hudson, city of Quinte West, township of Ryerson, municipality of North Grenville, town of Grand Valley, town of Goderich, Prescott-Russell, town of Wasaga Beach, municipality of Brooke-Alvinston, North Middlesex, town of Erin, township of Kerns, municipality of Dutton Dunwich, township of the North Shore, township of Dawn-Euphemia, township of Wollaston, Temagami—and I'm sure there will be many more to come who will add their support to this important bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that leniency.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member from Oxford. You have two minutes for your response.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: First of all, I want to thank all my colleagues and the members who spoke to the bill for their input.

There was just the question raised by the government side about the fact that it does not qualify for the

sunshine list. I just wanted to point out, as I mentioned in my remarks earlier, that, in fact, it was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing today who made the change to the TSSA organization, which is an identical organization, and made them have to post on the sunshine list. All we're doing is copying from that bill and trying to put it in this bill, so we can do the same for this one as we did for that one.

The other thing I think is very important to understand is that it may not be provincial money they're receiving, but I keep hearing from the government how much housing money the government is sending to the housing authorities, to municipal governments. They're using that money to pay the housing authorities, so their total funding is dependent on public money, not as it is with the other organization. They should be susceptible, or apply—the auditor position should apply to that so they can audit where the provincial money is going.

Lastly, I want to say we need to keep focused on what's really important. It's not the rules that were created 12 years ago; it's the fact that there are 165,000 families in Ontario waiting for affordable housing. It's the fact that money intended to provide housing is being wasted and misused—and we've been pointing that out every day. It's the fact that, by supporting this bill and moving it to committee, we'll have a chance to stop that waste and help those 165,000 families who are waiting for housing in this province and who are watching the money being spent on airplane flights—seven times to go to England when he didn't need to go there; maybe once, but he went seven times.

It's time to stop that and provide more housing for more needy people in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote at the end of private members' public business.

LONG-TERM CARE HOMES
AMENDMENT ACT (PREFERENCE
FOR VETERANS), 2015
LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES FOYERS
DE SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE
(PRÉFÉRENCE ACCORDÉE
AUX ANCIENS COMBATTANTS)

Ms. Forster moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to give preference to veterans for access to beds / Projet de loi 87, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les foyers de soins de longue durée pour accorder la préférence aux anciens combattants qui veulent avoir accès à des lits.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 87 this afternoon, the Long-Term Care Homes

Amendment Act. This bill was inspired by veterans; it's dedicated to the many veterans in my riding who have repeatedly brought this issue to my attention.

Before starting, I'd like to recognize some people in the gallery who are here to support this bill this afternoon.

First is Peter Comar, a member of Branch 4 Legion. He is 91 years young and served from 1943 to 1946 in Italy and Holland in the 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, Ottawa base. He was 21 years old when he was discharged; imagine that. Thank you, Peter.

Michael Blais, the president and founder of the Canadian Veterans Advocacy association, is here today, and his friend Luis Nunez.

We also have Mike Haines, my constituency assistant, who helped on preparing this bill.

We have Emily Hewitt, an OLIP student working in my office who did tremendous work on this bill, along with Eiman Zarrug, who is my QP staffer.

Last, but not least, we have my friend Bob Saracino, who was really the motivator behind this bill. Bob is the former mayor and regional councillor for many years for the city of Port Colborne. In my riding, he has spent decades working tirelessly on behalf of veterans on regional issues—since 1972. He did things like reducing taxes for Legions—eventually becoming tax exempt—as well as a number of ceremonial types of things around special anniversaries of the Legions and special days for veterans. Thank you, Bob.

Applause.

Ms. Cindy Forster: To prepare for this bill, I actually wandered around the Niagara region to a number of Legions, and I'd like to recognize the people I had the opportunity to meet: Peter Gemmel, John Orchard, Peter Daniels, John Dufort, Rick Hatt, Tom Townsley, Gerry Noel—at my own Branch 4 Legion—and several other World War II veterans in their nineties at Branch 4 who would otherwise have been here except for their health. Those two, specifically, were Gabe Gallant and Nick Uskiw.

The bill has two fundamental pieces to it; it's very simple. First, it expands the current definition of “veteran” under the Long-Term Care Homes Act to ensure that priority access to long-term-care beds is provided to all veterans who need it.

Secondly, it would put an onus on all long-term-care facilities across the province to ensure that all veterans who fall under the expanded definition who need access to the beds are eligible to apply for priority access.

The existing act restricts the term “veteran” to include only those members who served in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. There are no World War I veterans left, and the numbers of World War II and Korean War veterans are dwindling. These pre-1953—the year I was born, actually—or traditional veterans, as they are often referred to, are expected to significantly decline over the next few years. As such, funding for this program is expected to cease.

It is granted that the number of these traditional veterans is expected to decline, but it's certainly not right to conclude that, as a result, funds for this program

should cease. What many don't realize is that the number of traditional veterans is expected to decrease at the same time as the number of modern-day veterans is expected to significantly increase. Surely their need for long-term care health supports is needed within our system.

Traditional veterans currently have access to priority care via the veteran priority access beds or contract beds within long-term-care facilities. These beds are funded equally by the province and the federal government. Across Ontario there are about 1,100—1,097, to be exact—that traditional veterans only may apply for when they're deemed in need of care.

At almost 90% capacity, these beds are distributed mainly across three key locations in metropolitan areas: Sunnybrook in Toronto, Parkwood in London and Perley in Ottawa. They're excellent facilities that ensure veterans are well taken care of by hundreds of staff and volunteers committed to their service. For traditional veterans who are eligible to apply, irrespective of where they are in the province, their choices are limited to leaving their community and their families to be at one of these locations. When you hear that there are beds available at Sunnybrook and there are beds available, perhaps, in Ottawa or in some other parts of the country, it's because there is no access for modern-day veterans.

This legislation would ensure that all long-term-care facilities across the province give veterans, both traditional and modern, priority access.

Secondly, the even larger injustice about these beds that my bill seeks to correct is that even if there was an empty bed in any of these facilities—which there are; we saw something recently in the Toronto Star where there are, I think, 100 beds available—modern-day veterans, even though they need these beds, are not permitted by the act, by virtue of the fact that they served after 1953; they're not eligible to actually apply to go into one of those beds. They would be forced to queue up alongside the thousands of others in the province on the wait-list for months, if not years, before finding a placement that would serve their long-term-care needs.

As of 2012, there were almost 3,000 modern-day veterans in long-term-care facilities across Ontario. Because of when they served, these veterans were not eligible for any of the contract beds at the province's three designated facilities. Even if a bed was available, there's no guarantee that it would be within a reasonable physical proximity to their communities.

1530

Is this the way to treat the brave men and women who, without hesitation and without a moment's notice, sacrificed their own for the greater good of our communities and our safety? I think not, Speaker. As legislators, we have an opportunity to do more, and it is before us today.

Why is this important? A quote by Gord Jenkins, who is the president of the NATO Veterans Organization of Canada says, "Having to join a wait-list does not acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed to those who put their lives or health in jeopardy in service of their country; nor does it acknowledge that military service

has the same effect on modern veterans" as it does on traditional veterans.

As I mentioned earlier today, the number of traditional veterans is certainly expected to decrease. As of March 2014, the number of traditional veterans in all of Canada is 98,200. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, the population of modern-day veterans is just over six times that: almost 600,000 modern-day veterans across the country, the vast majority of whom live in Ontario. The average age of a traditional veteran is approximately 85. The average age of a modern-day veteran is 56. So the need is going to get greater. If this doesn't drive home the point of the dire need for this bill, I'm not sure what will.

According to the Veterans Ombudsman, in a 2013-14 report, modern-day veterans are the long-term-care client group with the least access to health care benefits. We have an opportunity to correct this long-standing injustice in our province. We don't have the right to deal with it across the country, but hopefully this will be the first step. This Long-Term Care Homes Act narrowly decides who gets access to these priority care beds.

Gordon Moore, the Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion, is quoted as saying, "Regardless of when or where a veteran served, the government has a duty of care." Unfortunately there's disagreement about how far that duty should extend.

When it comes to supporting our veterans, we are so fond of saying that a veteran is a veteran is a veteran. I have to tell you that I read that in a Legion magazine from March and April this month. Legislatively, though, it's unfortunate that this isn't the case, and this bill actually seeks to correct this.

In closing, I'd like to remind my colleagues of all stripes in the House today that we do have a duty of care. This bill has received broad support across the province: Doug Rapelje from my riding, a seniors advocate for many years, a president of the Ontario Command, Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada; Michael Blais, who's here with us today from the Canadian Veterans Advocacy association; Chris Ecklund, who couldn't be here today, but is the president and founder of Canadian Heroes—you'll often see them driving through communities with their Canadian Heroes vehicles—and Dave Gordon, executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command.

We have a duty to ensure that all veterans who have sacrificed on our behalf are given access to the priority care that they need and rightfully deserve. The legislation before us, under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, has created classes of veterans, and that is wrong. I can tell you, Speaker, in my meeting with some modern-day veterans last week when we had constituency week—they feel that. They feel isolated. They feel different than the traditional veterans from World War II and the Korean War. You'll hear that when you go out to Remembrance Day events. You'll hear it when you attend your local Legions. They don't feel that they have the respect of government or the respect of Ontarians in the

same way that World War II and Korean War veterans did.

This is a long-standing injustice that needs to be fixed. As the former Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion has said, all veterans, regardless of when or where they served, should have priority access to long-term-care beds. Speaker, it's up to us as legislators in this province to make sure that that happens.

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would advise our visitors in the gallery that I know it's a very passionate item but you can observe but you cannot participate. I would ask you to refrain from all clapping etc.

Further debate?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I rise now to speak to Bill 87, the Long-Term Care Homes Amendment Act, introduced by the member for Welland. I thank her very much for her advocacy for veterans.

I'm always pleased to stand up and speak in support of our veterans. I want to acknowledge many veterans, veteran supporters and veteran advocacy group representatives for being here today. Thank you very much.

I'm always pleased to speak in support of our veterans as well as those who are currently serving in our armed forces. That is why, Mr. Speaker, our current Long-Term Care Act does provide for priority access for many of our veterans.

But I want to speak to something more personal. A lot of what we do here, I think, reflects so much of who we are. Like many of you, I also have a connection to World War II. It's actually a very interesting connection.

My grandfather, when he was young, when he was in his teens, was very much part of the Indian nationalist freedom movement. When he was 18 or 19, he went to his own father and said that he wanted to join the Indian freedom movement. His father said, "No, I want you to study. I don't want you to join the freedom movement. Finish your education and then you can join it." My grandfather went on to become a doctor and then began to practise medicine. So he lost the opportunity—and then he got married—to be part of the Indian freedom movement.

Sometime in the 1940s, the Indian freedom leader, Mahatma Gandhi, struck a deal with the English—the British Empire—that if the Indians served in World War I or II, they might make some progression towards freedom. My grandfather actually joined the British military at that time, and served in Italy.

I just heard the member opposite, the member from Welland, speak about veteran Peter Comar, who served between 1943 and 1946 in Italy. Sir, I'm going to submit that there's a very good chance that you were in Italy at the same time that my grandfather, from a very small town in India, was serving in Italy. He was a surgeon.

There's something he told me that still resonates. He said to me, "Even though I was a surgeon in the British army, when an injured soldier came into the Red Cross hospital or makeshift camp, they did not distinguish

between Allied soldiers and a German soldier." Once they came to the physician, once they came to my grandfather, it did not make a difference. He treated them all the same.

I've always thought that that's a moment of grace in what was otherwise a very brutal business. And that's how I remember my grandfather.

Certainly I make it a point, sir, to attend every Remembrance Day in my own riding. In fact, I attend two of them: One is at the local Legion and there's also one at the Polish Community House. This is a subject that I truly, from the bottom of my heart, can relate to.

Coming back to the bill, one more time I would like to say that I really do applaud the spirit of what the member from Welland is trying to do. I really do applaud it, but our officials have looked at it. There might be an inadvertent consequence of the way the current bill is phrased. The way the bill is written, there could be a risk that Ontarians in need of a crisis placement could be outranked on the waiting list by veterans, and that could potentially endanger the health of those requiring crisis placement.

So I applaud the spirit, but perhaps there's a way to look at the bill more carefully. I'm very supportive of what she's trying to do but would definitely recommend that we study this bill some more.

1540

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to rise and voice my support for Bill 87, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act to give preference to veterans for access to long-term care beds in Ontario.

We in the PC caucus value the sacrifice and courage our veterans made in serving our country. We welcome the veterans in the House today and those across our communities, our province and our country. We will forever be in your debt and we thank you for that. We believe our veterans deserve priority access, and I again applaud the member for doing what she is doing with this bill.

Some of the challenges I have are not so much with this bill. I want to talk a little bit about, as the critic of long-term care, the government's lack of management in a lot of the areas of long-term care. I'm going to bring that up in a lot of my notes today, because I think it's important. The sad reality of having a member put in legislation to ensure that our veterans have priority is because the government has not done a good enough job on this file during their tenure.

This is about making sure that someone like—and in my community, a fellow who is pretty special and near to my heart is Arthur Haley. Arthur is a 99-year-old veteran. In fact, about two or three weeks ago I had the privilege and honour of attending a ceremony where he received a special medal from the government of France for his valour. A number of other people across our province have received that as well. It's sad to me on a day that we have to introduce legislation for this. If we were doing the proper job, we would ensure that we wouldn't have

legislation, that that would just be happening, and I'm going to focus on that.

We have almost 24,000 seniors waiting for a long-term-care bed, and our job is about ensuring that each of those people is not just another number on an Ontario long-term-care wait-list. It's about giving any of those people—and I'm not going to name names here today because there are too many to name—that service and the care to live out the remainder of their lives in dignity.

We've come to the point of legislating something that to me should be absolutely a priority from day one. I pulled out the AG's report from 2013-14. Since 2005, the number of Ontarians aged 75 has increased by 20%. The wait time has tripled from 36 days in 2004-05 to 108 days in 2013-14. That is a number that's going in the wrong direction. People 75 years of age and older will increase by another 30% between 2012 and 2021. These, as we all adoringly refer to them, are baby boomers. This is not a new revelation. We all know that we have an aging demographic coming at us. It truly is something that any government of any stripe, you would think, would have made a priority and be in a place to do that.

In 2012, the long-term-care wait-list listed that crisis clients had a wait of 94 days. I'm not certain that ever in my life I would consider the word "crisis" and equate that to 94 days. It's simply unacceptable. Moderate needs are a 10- to 14-month wait. Think of the burden on that individual who needs a long-term-care bed. Think of the burden on the family members trying to provide care, comfort and compassion to their family member or their friend or their veteran who needs that care, waiting between 94 days in a crisis situation or 10 to 14 months—over a year—having to be told, "Well, we'll get to you; we'll get to you."

This is absolutely deplorable: In 2011-12, the stats tell us, 15% of all clients—all patients on a wait-list—died before receiving long-term care. It's simply unacceptable, and I don't see a lot of change. I don't hear a lot from the government talking about this in this House, about how we're going to change and the plan that truly is there in black and white to achieve better outcomes in this.

There are significant pressures on the availability of long-term care and home-care services in Ontario, because they have failed. They have not put their actions into action. They put lots of words. The minister is a wonderful person. I've had meetings with her, we've talked, but at the end of the day, I think even she has to admit this government has not lived up to the expectations where seniors' long-term-care needs are. I think she needs to be able to step up in her cabinet and ensure that this is a priority going forward. Again, we wouldn't need legislation like this if we were spending our money more appropriately, more practically and putting it where the priorities are.

We've wasted billions of dollars on gas plants. We've wasted billions of dollars on eHealth care. We've wasted millions and millions of dollars on things like Ornge, and yet we continually hear of people who, again, have 94-day crisis clients.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Bradley, how are you, sir? I may be talking on your behalf here, at some point, Mr. Bradley. I'm thinking of this for you, sir.

I say that with all due reverence—one of the longest-serving members of our great Legislature.

I have talked to many long-term stakeholders, the people who are actually operating our facilities, the people who are working in our facilities. Most importantly, the patients and the families have told me in no uncertain terms that the situation is dire and critical.

Over the 12 years of this Liberal government, the government ignored this file, in my mind. They have not made it a priority. The industry itself underwent significant changes and, as a result, is facing more complex problems than ever before. For example, residents are staying a longer time in long-term-care homes today. They average about 2.6 years, as opposed to 12 or 18 months, which used to be the norm. So, yes, there's more complexity. All the more reason we need to have those beds available when that patient needs it at the time. We can't be saying, "Ninety-four days is what your crisis wait-list is going to be, and just live with that at home and we'll get to you when we can." We can't be telling them it's 10 to 14 months for those people who have increasingly complex needs, and that "we'll get to you when we can."

The Canadian Institute for Health Information has compiled data that shows as many as 80% of long-term-care residents have a heart/circulation disease, hypertension and Alzheimer's or another related dementia. I've said in this House a number of times in my three years that Alzheimer's and dementia, to me, is another tsunami coming at us. It's something that, again, I don't believe the current government of the day is addressing nearly enough or is putting enough priority on. Again, that just puts more burden on the system overall.

Another challenge facing the sector is operational costs. Again, it's common knowledge today that after wages, for most of these facilities, the rising cost of utilities—hydro specifically—is their second-highest expense. We know where that's going. The costs have tripled and doubled. We now have the highest energy rates in the continent, and they're planned to be scheduled to increase and doubled and tripled again over the next four years. It's simply unacceptable, because if those operating costs are going up, what's getting cut is the actual care and service and the number of beds available, which are the only ways that they can turn to.

Every time you hike energy rates, that's less money going into senior care services and front-line care. It's unsustainable; it's unacceptable.

What's needed in the sector? Funding, beds and more hours of care.

There are 23,457 people on wait-lists for long-term care. That's absolutely abhorrent. There are 76,535 beds in 627 homes, and they usually only become vacated, sadly, when someone dies. We need to ensure that this is becoming an absolute priority.

The Liberals actually assigned a second minister of health, whose task is to ensure that Ontarians who require long-term care get long-term care. You may hear her talk about overachievements, but I put the challenge out to her today to truly make this an absolute priority so that we don't have to be bringing a piece of—all my respect to you, colleague and fellow member of the Legislature, but I wish you didn't have to bring this forward. This should be something that's happening without you having to bring a private member's bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the government to turn their attention to this.

I thank, again, all of the veterans, both here in the crowd today and across our wonderful community, province and country, for all that they have done. We will always respect you, and we will always be in your debt. I certainly hope that we can address this so that you are the priority that you should be.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'll turn my time over to my colleague.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill—veterans and long-term care—and I thank my colleague from Welland for bringing forward this legislation.

Let me start by saying that I have an enormous respect for our nation's veterans. When discussing this bill with my colleague the MPP from Niagara Falls—he represents Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake—I discovered that his own father was a veteran. James Gates served from 1939 to 1945 in the Canadian Forces and actually ended up staying an extra year in Europe with the military.

As many in this chamber know, my riding of Windsor West has a strong history of supporting veterans. These men and women answered the call when Canada needed them. Today, when I visit legions across Windsor and Essex county, such as the Riverside Branch 255 and the Ambassador Branch 143, I am reminded of how much the people of Windsor respect their veterans and the sacrifices they made for us.

I think we need to remember that our Legions not only serve veterans from the First and Second World Wars and Korea, but include younger veterans who served during Canada's peacekeeping operations and during the mission in Afghanistan.

1550

A personal friend of mine, Bruce Moncur, is a veteran of the Afghanistan conflict, and he was seriously wounded near Kandahar city during Operation Medusa in 2006. He was wounded, and as a result suffered the loss of 5% of his brain following the injury.

We cannot have classes of veterans here in Ontario. Every man and woman who puts on the uniform deserves our respect and deserves to know their province will be there for them, as they were there for their province. Unfortunately, because of when some veterans served, they are not eligible for any of the contract beds at the province's three designated facilities. Even if a bed is

available, there is no guarantee that it is within reasonable physical proximity to their home communities.

The bill before us today seeks to remedy this. If passed, the bill would amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act by extending priority access for long-term care to modern-day veterans. This would include those serving after World Wars I and II or the Korean War. Those veterans are currently excluded under current legislative definitions. This bill also amends the Long-Term Care Homes Act to ensure that these veterans are given priority access to all long-term-care facilities in the province.

Speaker, I'd like to say this is a good bill, but instead I'm going to say that this is a great bill. It's supported by a number of veterans' organizations, including the Ontario Dominion Command, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Ontario veteran advocacy centre and local Legions across Ontario.

As New Democrats we believe that all veterans, regardless of when or where they served, should have priority access to long-term care. Unfortunately, right now this is not the case. We need to change this, and we need to start recognizing that all veterans, regardless of where or when they served, should have priority access to long-term care.

I hope all members of this chamber consider supporting this bill, and I look forward to further debate.

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

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It's my honour and privilege today to rise in this House and talk about Bill 87, the Long-Term Care Homes Amendment Act (Preference for Veterans). I want to start by thanking my colleague across the aisle from Welland for her passionate advocacy. It's my pleasure to stand in this House and have a conversation on a bill that the member has brought to this place, one that's very important. I knew the member, I'm proud to say, before I was elected, and I continue to be someone who admires her greatly, her advocacy in particular, so thank you, colleague, for bringing this forward.

Of course, our veterans are so much a part of our DNA and our heart and soul in this country. I see many of them here today. We salute you. We thank you. And your family and your advocacy partners who are here, as well: We also salute you. Thank you for your years of service and dedication to our country.

The member from Welland referenced the vets in Branch 4, so I'd like to—if any of them are watching—salute the veterans in Branch 60 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Burlington, who do amazing work to honour and to continue honouring our veterans in support of their work.

As the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care alluded to—and said, in fact—we support the spirit and the intent of this legislation. I want to talk about that in a moment, but, like so many members of this House, I have a personal connection to veterans, as well.

My father, Hugh McMahon, served in the Second World War. Like one of the gentlemen here today, he

served in the Italian campaign, one of the most brutal campaigns of the Second World War. Dad came to his calling as a young man of 16. He lied about his age, in fact; I don't know how happy he'd be about me telling the House and Ontarians that, but he did, because he was keen to serve, and off he went. He got his commission at Sandhurst military academy, which at that time was a training centre for the Allied forces and, again, spent time liberating Holland at the end of the war and fought in the Italian campaign.

When Dad came back from the war, he continued to serve in the military. I'm glad that my colleague from Windsor West is here, because I grew up in Windsor; Dad was the honorary colonel of the Essex and Kent Scottish regiment in Windsor and served valiantly for many, many years in dedicated service to our military, and as a veteran himself.

He never missed a year at the cenotaph, so I try to honour that spirit as well. This year, in my own community of Burlington, like so many members, I was pleased to be at the cenotaph in Burlington. It was a very moving occasion for me, because it was the first time as an elected member to be standing in that place, resonant with all of our veterans and our community leaders, honouring their sacrifice and service and thinking of my dad and his service to our country and how much it meant to him. When I was growing up, I used to go with dad to the cenotaph in Windsor. I enjoyed those occasions; they are some of the most memorable of my young life.

So to have the opportunity to join with members of this House to thank our veterans, to speak in support of them and their valiant contributions to global peace and security, and to recognize them and talk about how much we value their contribution to our country is a welcome opportunity indeed.

Our government, on the long-term-care front, has doubled the investment in long-term-care support and beds since 2003 by 200%. That contribution is an important one, and we consider it to be an important one and we will continue to support it.

Again, I want to thank the member from Welland and say in closing that we applaud the spirit and we support the intent of this bill. I think, as the associate minister mentioned, there may be some challenges and unintended consequences with some of the language in the bill, so those things can be discussed, debated and worked out. But the fact that the member would bring a bill which seeks to really talk about our veterans and their care is something we applaud and support. Again, in spirit and intent, our support is there, Speaker.

Thank you to all the members of this House who have spoken so valiantly and importantly today of our veterans. I join them, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: It is with great pleasure that I'm able to join in this debate of Bill 87, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to give preference to veterans for access to beds.

A couple of opening comments in the few moments that I have: I guess one of them is the disappointment that, quite frankly, this is necessary. When it was brought to the attention of our caucus that this was the bill to be debated, I was shocked. I was shocked to think that in our country, in our province, such a bill would be necessary.

Like most of the speakers who have spoken, I, too, have recollections and certainly stories. One of my uncles was the captain of one of those convoy ships that crossed the Atlantic at great danger to themselves in the dark days before radar was in any way something that they could count on. It serves to remind all of us that you don't have to dig too deeply to find connections with veterans. And certainly I have the family of an Afghan veteran, and that certainly brought together our community in recognizing that it happens so close to home.

I want to talk about the fact that this government has chosen to look at the long-term-care home as almost secondary in its planning. When we raised the issue that there were thousands of beds that were necessary, the emphasis that the government had was, "No, it's going to be on home care." And so we get the kind of statistics that we heard from my colleague the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound of 24,000 people waiting. The fact that people can, for urgent matters, be looking at 94 days—we think 94 hours is a long time when it is something that is urgent. But it has not been at the top of the radar screen for this government.

Certainly when you look at the allocation of beds, we added 20,000 beds to the total in this province, but that was 12 years ago, and there hasn't been the same commitment in the last 12 years. So it is of crisis proportion. It's certainly something that comes to a head when you look at the people in our communities who we all agree deserve our support in this bill. We need new direction in the province for long-term-care beds. This is a demonstration of how important that initiative is.

1600

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure—a privilege—to stand and speak on this particular issue. I want to thank the member from Welland for bringing it to our attention.

Many people, I think, would be shocked that this is the state of affairs in this province. I'm a member at branch 530 in Waterloo. I was speaking to my friend Angus, who's a World War II veteran. He's 91 years young. I told him about this bill. He said, "Catherine, it should be all veterans." So it's very much on the mind of today's veterans because they're living it; it's their lived experience.

The member from Welland has received an amazing amount of support from across the province. The Royal Canadian Legion sent this—they actually put it in a news release:

"The Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command has learned there will be legislation introduced in the Ontario

Legislature to amend the present Long-Term Care Homes Act.

“Presently, there are empty beds in long-term-care facilities that were designated for our veterans,” says Legion provincial president Bruce Julian. “The proposed amendments in this legislation would certainly benefit veterans in the community that may not be eligible for these beds. Ontario Command fully supports the amendments to this legislation.”

I think the point is that there are empty beds that modern-day veterans do not have access to because of language, because of the terminology in the legislation. What I would say is that this needs to change. That’s why this bill is before this House: The legislation needs to correct this long-standing wrong and injustice, as the legislation is written.

This bill needs to move quickly because there’s an urgency. It needs to be accelerated. The issues that our modern-day veterans are experiencing—everything: post-traumatic stress coming back from Afghanistan and other jurisdictions—it’s painful. They should not have to wait and be viewed as a second-class veteran. A veteran is a veteran is a veteran, and this legislation will correct that.

I also have a very impressive letter here from Lieutenant General the Honourable Romeo Dallaire. This just came in, actually. He comments on this piece of legislation. It’s dated today from Ottawa. It says:

“Dear Ms. Forster, MPP Welland, Ontario,

“I am pleased to learn of the private member’s legislation that you sponsored, aiming to provide greater access to long-term-care facilities for veterans in your province.

“At a time when members of our armed forces are deployed on so many dangerous missions around the world, we must live up to the obligations of the social covenant that binds us with them in their service. The covenant calls for a lifelong commitment. This legislation is addressing a significant gap in support to veterans who need long-term care.

“Indeed, your private member’s legislation is a critical step in the right direction and an example that I hope your federal counterparts will follow so that the appropriate changes can be made federally to advance this mission.

“I wish you every success with this initiative.”

That’s Lieutenant General the Honourable Romeo Dallaire. He actually puts a little note. He says, “Well done.”

That does bring me, though, to the federal situation. This bill has come to the federal House of Commons three times. Mr. Harper and his friends have voted this legislation down three times. It is shameful. This is the federal government that also, if I may remind you, up until most recently, two months ago, was insisting that veterans who were amputees would have to prove to the government that they were still amputees every year. They’ve since changed that. Now they only have to prove that they’re still an amputee every three years.

Mr. Speaker, this is a responsibility that we bear as legislators to correct a wrong. We have the opportunity in

this House today to send a very strong signal to the federal government. This is a shared responsibility; it is. While we on this side of the House think that more can be done for long-term care for our veterans provincially, because it is a provincial responsibility, it is also a shared responsibility with the federal government. From a legislative perspective, this can be done. This loophole can be closed. We can make sure that all veterans have access to these priority beds. This should happen.

The member from Welland has done an amazing amount of research. She has listened. She has consulted. She has followed through on her responsibility as a member of provincial Parliament. Now it’s our responsibility to make sure that this bill passes, that it is accelerated, and that the appropriate funding in the legislation is changed to ensure that we honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice for us—who put themselves before others—with this public service, with this access to appropriate health care.

Obviously, the restrictive definition of “veteran” in the legislation can be changed, and I think we can work through whatever concerns the government has. I think it can happen. This private member’s bill should pass quickly, and we should correct this wrong.

Thank you very much for being here today. Let’s get this job done.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 87, and thank you to the member from Welland for bringing this forward. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the veterans who are here with us this afternoon.

We are discussing issues that are very near and dear to my heart and to the hearts of many of my constituents. As you may know, 20% of my constituents consist of veterans—sorry, of seniors. I don’t know how many veterans are left, but at some point, there might well have been 20%.

Make no mistake: The provincial government puts the utmost importance on honouring our veterans, and we expect no less from the federal government. Unfortunately, for some time now, that expectation has come up considerably short.

I am glad that the member from Welland has brought this forward. I am always eager to speak in favour of examining our seniors’ care and expanding the efforts we make to ensure that those who have sacrificed for us have what they need.

With our aging population, we must be diligent in ensuring that our services reach those who need them most. As a society, we are constantly learning how services from other levels of government are failing the needs of our veterans.

I am glad to support the spirit of this bill. Providing quality care as fast as possible is something we owe to those who have served their country and this province. I do echo the concerns of my colleagues, however. As I am ever a fan of a balanced approach, I know that those who

were in critical condition and in need of care may be taken on urgently.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak to Bill 87, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to give preference to veterans for access to beds. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my colleague from Welland for introducing this bill, which amends the Long-Term Care Homes Act by extending priority access for long-term care to modern-day veterans, those serving after World Wars I and II or the Korean War, who are excluded under the current legislation.

Before I go further into it, I would also like to acknowledge and welcome our veterans and guests here today at Queen's Park. Thank you.

Each November we celebrate Remembrance Day, but the impact that our veterans have had on our daily lives is experienced all year long. Our freedoms are a product of their sacrifice; our opportunities, a mark of their defence. In return, we have an obligation to support our veterans—all veterans—in whatever ways we can. On Remembrance Day, we honour them, but today we have the opportunity to ensure that they, too, are protected.

Currently, the Long-Term Care Homes Act provides priority access to long-term-care homes to veterans of World Wars I and II and the Korean War. Bill 87 would extend that priority access to modern-day veterans who experience the same hardships but are denied the care they rightfully deserve because of a loophole.

Today, we have the opportunity to close that loophole. Today, we have the opportunity to show our veterans the respect they have shown us.

Under the current rules, our health care system has created classes of veterans. Regardless of when or where they served, they should have priority access to long-term care, and this bill will do just that.

Many veterans who want to take advantage of a priority placement must move hundreds of miles from their loved ones. This is not a choice that anyone or any family should have to make.

1610

I'd like to share that my great uncles and grandfather served proudly and are remembered fondly. My grandfather was eligible, and our family appreciated the bed he had priority access to in London, which happened to be close enough to his Kitchener home. All veterans deserve equitable consideration.

I'd also like to take the opportunity, while I have it, to share just how proud we are in Oshawa to be home to so many service clubs. We have the Ontario Regiment and armoury and the Ontario Regiment RCAC Regimental Museum, which you should visit if you have the opportunity. We have very active service clubs, including the 420 Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association, Unit 42 of the Canadian Corps Association, the Navy Club and the dynamic Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 43, with its proud pipe band, and Royal Canadian Legion

Sir William Stephenson, Branch 637, of which I am a proud Friday karaoke-singing member.

I personally value the opportunity to connect with our veterans. Our communities appreciate the involvement and leadership of our young cadets, and our province appreciates the safety and the opportunities. Our communities are grateful to our veterans. I'd like to take this opportunity to say that we should support this bill. Thank you again to the member from Welland for putting it forward.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I just have a few seconds, but I wanted to thank the member for Welland. I wanted to offer my support and ask for her help.

I represent the communities just out here. I go down to the fathers at Good Hope, and the vets I represent have post-traumatic stress disorder. My residents' association thinks these people are drunks and street-involved, and when some of them who are trained to be violent get violent, they end up becoming attacked. They're not functional enough to get into a home. The Highway of Heroes ends there, and these are some of the most forgotten young men and women. It is tragic that Veterans Affairs has abandoned them.

We need to work with the federal government and not make this a partisan issue, and get some of these young men and women ready, so that they can go. I am embarrassed when I walk down the streets of the economic capital of this country with what I see. I want to thank you, and I look forward to working with you on this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Welland. You have two minutes for your response.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to start by thanking the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, the members from Windsor West, Burlington, York-Simcoe, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oshawa and the Minister of the Environment.

I just want to go back to a couple of the comments. The associate minister said that there is priority access for many veterans, but in the scheme of things, 1,097 beds across the entire province with most of them being in the three metropolitan areas and really no beds anywhere else in the province other than an odd—I think it works out to half a floating bed in many municipalities, of which there are 444. When we have 600,000 modern-day veterans across Canada—almost half of those who live in Ontario—there certainly is a need to pass this legislation, and I'm prepared to work at the committee level to address your concerns.

I agree with the members of the PC Party about the lack of nursing home beds generally in the province. The wait-lists get longer and longer. Unfortunately, community care is just not enough for people to actually remain in their homes for up to three and four years without having more care provided at home or having more beds available to them.

I want to thank my guests who all came here today to support this important bill, and the people who wrote

letters of support for making that effort to attend, for making that commitment.

Lastly: to the veterans who, every day, put their minds, their bodies and their lives at risk for all of us. I think the least we can do is give them some priority access to long-term care when they need it.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to stand to correct my record. Earlier in my closing remarks to my ballot item, I referred to changes that the minister made to the TSSA and said they were related to the sunshine list, while actually the changes were to the auditor's oversight, and the same for the other part of my bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. A member is always allowed to correct his own record.

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

PROTECTING PASSENGER SAFETY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA SÉCURITÉ DES PASSAGERS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 43, standing in the name of Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Fraser has moved second reading of Bill 53, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to increase the penalty for transporting a passenger for compensation without a licence, permit or authorization.

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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j)—Mr. Fraser?

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to send the bill to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Fraser has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Agreed? Agreed. So moved.

HOUSING SERVICES CORPORATION ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA RESPONSABILISATION DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DES SERVICES DE LOGEMENT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Hardeman has moved second reading of Bill 74, An Act

to amend the Housing Services Act, 2011 and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996.

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): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Social policy, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be sent to social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

LONG-TERM CARE HOMES AMENDMENT ACT (PREFERENCE FOR VETERANS), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES FOYERS DE SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE (PRÉFÉRENCE ACCORDÉE AUX ANCIENS COMBATTANTS)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Forster has moved second reading of Bill 87, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to give preference to veterans for access to beds.

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): Orders of the day?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Oh, sorry. My mistake. One second.

Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—Ms. Forster?

Ms. Cindy Forster: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be sent to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

Now we can go to orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR JOBS AND PROSPERITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'INFRASTRUCTURE AU SERVICE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 6, Loi édictant la Loi

de 2015 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills had the floor with time remaining. The member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to continue debate on this important infrastructure bill, but I first of all want to congratulate my friend the member for Oxford on the passage of his private member's bill this afternoon for second reading and to thank the members in the House for their support. It's well deserved, the credit he has received this afternoon.

Yes, I've had the opportunity to talk about this bill—I think this is the third time now. It's a 60-minute leadoff speech. This is now, I think, the final opportunity that I will have to speak to second reading of this particular bill. But we know that the bill would enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act and would, if passed, enshrine a series of principles, requirements and authorities to promote the improvement of infrastructure planning in the province of Ontario.

1620

I have in my hands the fall economic statement document that the government presented to the House last fall. It shows, on page 123, the government's planned infrastructure expenditures for the 2014-15 fiscal year, which is the fiscal year that just concluded last month, at the end of March, and that their intention and plan was to spend \$12.3 billion on infrastructure. The government talks about a long-term infrastructure commitment in many respects and in many contexts. I know for a fact that the government is planning to spend billions of dollars on infrastructure in the province of Ontario in future years. I think we can anticipate that, no matter what happens in three years' time, the provincial government is going to have an important role to play in terms of infrastructure spending in the province of Ontario. We, of course, expect partnerships with the federal government to leverage additional federal funding to assist in these identified infrastructure needs. This bill is intended to create this long-term infrastructure plan with specific criteria and principles upon which we make these infrastructure planning decisions.

The government is going to spend this money, so I feel I have an obligation, as the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, to bring forward the infrastructure project priorities that have been identified in my riding by many of our partners, whether it be our local government, the county of Wellington; the region of Halton; our local municipalities in the riding of Wellington–Halton Hills; our hospital boards; our school boards, and so on.

I want to, first of all, mention the Groves Memorial Community Hospital project that I advocated for for many years now. I'm pleased to report that just before Christmas of last year, the Ministry of Health gave us approval for stage 2 of the new hospital project. We received the word, I think, on December 22, just before

Christmas. I was very pleased to express my appreciation publicly to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, as well as make a phone call to the deputy minister's office to thank the deputy minister for his role. I would say again: It's exciting to see this new hospital project moving forward closer to construction. We have to continue. It's a multi-stage planning process. We continue with the planning and detailed preparation for the commencement of the construction phase, but I want to continue to highlight the need for our new hospital in this Legislature, and I appreciate the support of the government. It is our hope to ensure that the hospital is built to realize our vision of a new hospital to meet the needs of our community in the 21st century.

I am also privileged to represent the community of Georgetown in the town of Halton Hills. There was a significant renovation of the existing Georgetown Hospital; just a couple of years ago, it was completed. In fact, I pushed hard for that one as well. The member from Mississauga–Streetsville might remember the day that I brought forward a private member's resolution in this House—I know he was here—when I called upon the government to support that project. I recall his remarks. The fact is, right before the election, strangely enough, the Minister of Health came to visit Georgetown and announced a grant of up to \$2.6 million to support the building of the new emergency department of our local hospital, coinciding with the installation of the new CT scanner. This was very good news for our community right before the election. I expressed my appreciation to the minister for visiting right before the election and for her support of that project. It's an exciting improvement to the hospital services in that community, and, obviously, I'm very excited about it as well.

I continue to support health care improvements in my riding. I know that going forward there will be ideas for health care improvements, capital improvements, in Georgetown, and new equipment requirements. I will continue to do everything I can to advocate to strengthen their hospital services in Georgetown, as well as the other supportive health care services.

Mr. Speaker, you're well aware and many of the members are aware that for years now I've been advocating for the Highway 6 Morriston bypass on the Ministry of Transportation's five-year capital plan in what they call the Southern Highways Program. We know that the upcoming provincial budget is coming soon, in the next few days. The process, of course, is that once the capital allocation is determined for the Ministry of Transportation, the ministry staff look again at the five-year plan for new highway construction in the Southern Highways Program. I have raised this many, many times with successive Ministers of Transportation in every way that is possible. We know that the Premier, a former Minister of Transportation herself in this Legislature, last summer publicly acknowledged that the project was a priority, in response to a question from my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, which was interesting. Obviously, if the Premier, as a former Minister of Transportation, thinks

that it should be a priority—and that’s what she said in the House; it’s on Hansard—surely, hopefully, the Minister of Transportation would want to ensure that her credibility is maintained on this specific issue.

The Morriston Bypass Coalition has made a trip to Queen’s Park on a number of occasions. They comprise a number of groups and individuals, including the township of Puslinch, the county of Wellington, the cities of Guelph and Hamilton, both the Guelph and Hamilton chambers of commerce, as well as prominent businesses such as Tim Hortons, Maple Leaf Foods—including Michael McCain—Nestlé Waters, Sleeman Breweries, Canada Bread and Cargill—all of these organizations coming together at the request of another former Minister of Transportation, Mr. Chiarelli, who urged the community to come together and develop a business case for the project. That’s been done. So again, we call upon the government to include the Morriston bypass on the Southern Highways Program, the Ministry of Transportation’s five-year plan for new highway construction.

Another important infrastructure project in my riding that I’ve talked about in this Legislature—and I’m pleased to see the member for Halton is here, because I know she agrees: We need a new courthouse in Halton. The existing courthouse was built more than 50 years ago. It’s no longer adequate to meet the needs of one of the province’s fastest-growing regions. We know that Milton is probably the fastest-growing community in the country and has been for a number of years. The existing facility is aged, overcrowded and inadequate in terms of security and privacy.

Our regional chair, Gary Carr—you know him, Mr. Speaker, a former Speaker of the Legislature, now regional chair—regional council, courthouse users, lawyers, judges, people who work there and all of Halton’s four MPPs are behind the project. We’ve raised this in the Legislature. We continue to look to the minister—actually, the Attorney General, the minister responsible—to do what she can to push for this new courthouse. We believe that this should be a priority and we call upon the government to include it in the provincial budget. This would be a perfect opportunity, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, for the government to commit itself to the Halton courthouse in the upcoming provincial budget.

Next, I would mention the need for provincial support for the town of Erin’s water management system. The town of Erin is perhaps the largest municipality in southern Ontario without a waste water management system. This has impacted the town’s ability to attract commercial and industrial investment and is forcing ratepayers to pay increasingly higher taxes. In order to do the work that needs to be done, the town of Erin would have to move forward with a big construction project to build the sewer and water system that the community needs. The town of Erin has a population, I believe, of around 11,000 people, and in the hamlets of Hillsburgh and the old village of Erin there are around 4,500 people. For the project, I’ve seen estimates of up to \$68 million.

They cannot afford to do the work to install the modern sewage treatment system that they need in the town of Erin without a substantial provincial component.

We know that Infrastructure Ontario has loan programs, but I call upon the government to support the project in any way they can so as to ensure that we can move forward. The town of Erin needs the support of the provincial government, and I’m obviously very supportive of that.

I look at the Metrolinx–GO Transit issue. The very first day it was possible to do so, the day that we had the throne speech after the provincial election—you remember in the summer, I say to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt: We had the throne speech, and that day I tabled three private member’s resolutions in the Legislature. They are actually the first, second and third private member’s resolutions on the order paper, and one of them calls upon the government to keep its promise to provide all-day, two-way GO train service through Wellington–Halton Hills to Kitchener–Waterloo.

I know that was promised during the election campaign. I’ve asked a number of rhetorical questions as to when that’s going to happen. I think we’ve heard a response—after the election, mind you—we were told it might take 10 years. I would call upon the government to expedite the keeping of that promise that they made to the people of our area, and I will continue to raise it. I have that private member’s resolution tabled as a way of drawing attention to the issue, and I will continue to raise it.

1630

We need a new Holy Cross Catholic school in the community of Georgetown. This is something that I’ve raised with the Ministry of Education and the current Minister of Education even before the election, and I continue to do so. It was previously the Halton Catholic school board’s highest priority for new school construction. I was disappointed that the minister, unfortunately, was unwilling to approve that project before the election. We continue to raise that issue.

We need a new traffic light in Rockwood, very close to the new École Harris Mill Public School.

There’s a crossing that has been determined and identified by the mayor of the township of Guelph/Eramosa, Chris White, as being unsafe at Highway 7 and MacLennan and Dunbar Streets in Rockwood. I would urge the Ministry of Transportation to show support for that particular project as well.

The township of Centre Wellington has 105 bridges. It’s a relatively small community in my riding. They need provincial support too.

I realize my time is up, Mr. Speaker, but I hope to have an opportunity to put more of these project ideas on the record of this Legislature, asking the government to show support for the infrastructure needs in my riding. They’re going to spend the money anyway. I’ll have a chance to do that at third reading.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'll be doing our party's lead on this very shortly. But I do want to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, who is certainly a champion for his riding. He referenced other areas of the province that have increasing and long-term infrastructure needs that haven't been met.

The bill before us talks about a 10-year plan moving forward to identify, categorize and prioritize our infrastructure needs, given that we have a massive national deficit of infrastructure. A large portion of that exists right here in the province of Ontario. We think that that somewhat makes sense. We certainly would want to know the vision and the priorities, going forward, of the government. But there's nothing that prohibits them from creating a 10-year plan, as it is, as a stand-alone measure of the ministry.

I will be talking about that. We'll be looking at what exactly are the mechanics of this 10-year plan. How do we ensure that all voices are heard and communities are consulted when it comes to adding or prioritizing those important infrastructure needs that the member from Halton Hills just referenced—schools, hospitals, roads and public transit systems—of which all of our communities have varying needs and all of which, I would argue, are incredibly important to our various communities?

We'll be interested to hear from the government in terms of what the process is in that 10-year plan to actually make those priorities, who actually does get to prioritize them and what are the metrics that are based on it, as well as a whole host of other things that fall under the category of the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act.

I want to thank the member for adding his most intelligent comments to the debate. I look forward to hearing from other members.

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

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, it's been very interesting listening to the debate. I listened to the member for Wellington–Halton Hills and to the member from the third party who just finished speaking. Obviously they're in support of this bill, number one. Number two: Obviously they have a list of projects in each of their ridings that they would like to see covered by the work that this bill is going to do.

The challenge then is, how do we sort out what projects to do, what projects take priority, what projects perhaps get done later or not done at all? The beauty of this legislation is that it sets out certain principles so that we all know the rules going into this business. What I would like to do is just outline the eight principles that we should all keep in mind when we're deciding whether a project—when we all have our pet projects for our respective ridings:

(1) Infrastructure planning should be done on a long-term basis.

(2) There should be a need for alignment with demographic and economic trends and fiscal plans.

(3) Promotion of economic competitiveness, productivity, job creation and training.

(4) Infrastructure planning should create opportunities to utilize innovations.

(5) Projects should be prioritized based on identified priorities and should support various other local plans.

(6) Infrastructure planning should be evidence-based and transparent;

(7) Planning should help protect the environment and improve resiliency to climate change; and

(8) Infrastructure planning and investment should ensure the provision of core public services.

If we all keep those eight principles in mind as this legislation is passed—if it's passed—we will get the infrastructure done that Ontario desperately needs. We'll get it done in a fair way and a transparent way.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just want to commend everybody who is speaking on trying to take the politics out of long-term planning, because that's what it's really about.

The problem is that we're here for four-year terms, and too often infrastructure planning involves decades. We see too many people in the political sphere—I'm not just talking provincial, but federal, municipal and regional; we still have York region where my riding is. Too often they are focused on their political careers and their short term, and getting re-elected. They don't want to look at those projects that are decades in the making. I think that's really what the discussion should be focused on.

As the member mentioned, hospitals are a big part of the infrastructure that we hear about in our ridings. We have a Vaughan hospital that is going to be a branch of Mackenzie Health. It will be the Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital. We still haven't seen progress, in terms of the deed for the land being given to the proper authorities so they can commence getting to work on having a hospital.

It also makes me nervous, because I'm here every day that the Legislature is open, and I hear how short of funds we are, that we're basically borrowing from Peter to pay Paul at this point, that we're talking about selling Hydro One, which has basically an enormous debt. We are concerned that the government will somehow skirt paying off this debt, pass the debt on to some other government agency and take that money to pay for their past election promises.

The election promises centred on building infrastructure. We're all aware of that, and we all want infrastructure to get built. But there's only one taxpayer, and that taxpayer is paying municipal tax, they're paying provincial tax, they're paying federal tax, they're paying sales tax, they're paying gas tax, they're paying a health tax. Now they're going to pay a carbon tax. They are taxed to the limit, and we can no longer say we're going to find the money that way. So it's really about focusing on the resources we have. Stop wasting them, and let's get to work and take the politics out of infrastructure planning.

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

I now return to the member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the member for Essex, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the member for Thornhill for their responses to my brief remarks this afternoon.

Yes, I believe the minister, who talked about the principles that are enunciated in the bill—those are principles that I think we can all agree with. We might offer different suggestions about the weight each of those principles would hold in terms of the decision-making, but I think those are, by and large, good principles.

If the bill goes to committee—which I hope it will—if we have public hearings and there is additional input from the general public suggesting changes, obviously I hope the government would be open to that.

But again, as I said, I haven't been able to get through my full list of infrastructure priorities. I will continue this discussion at third reading, when we get back to third reading, assuming that the bill does go to committee and is reported back to the House.

I want to talk briefly—I only have a minute left—about the cancellation of the Connecting Link Program a couple of years ago. I know that many of the government members understand that the Connecting Link Program existed for many, many years; I think going back to 1927, when George Howard Ferguson was Premier of Ontario. It was one of the very first infrastructure partnership programs between the provincial government and municipalities.

As Ontario was building its road network across the province in the 1920s, it was seen as necessary to have the provincial government support local municipalities where provincial highways went through built-up areas. So there was this long-term partnership and an expectation that that partnership would continue, and the provincial government would support up to 90% of the cost of Connecting Link projects.

When the Connecting Link Program was scrapped, it left a whole bunch of municipalities high and dry. Of course provincial governments encouraged the municipalities to do long-term infrastructure planning. For example, the town of Halton Hills had \$9.3 million in projects for the next few years along the Connecting Link through Georgetown that they expected to be funded by the provincial government for up to 90% of the cost. This is roadwork that needs to be done. Then, all of a sudden, they were left high and dry.

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I realize my time is up, Mr. Speaker, and I don't want to force you to cut me off again, so I'll let it go. But at the same time, I implore the government to listen to what we have to say. I know you're going to spend the money on infrastructure projects. I urge you to look at what we need to get done in Wellington–Halton Hills.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The member for Wellington–Halton Hills has inspired me. He wanted to continue to

do more, after his hour-long lead. I hope to at least touch on some of the issues here.

Speaker, if you will allow me a little bit of latitude, it's been a really interesting week here at Queen's Park.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, interesting politically, but interesting personally as well.

I just want to give a shout-out to my executive assistant. His name is Merv Richards. He's up in the office right now watching. Merv, thanks for everything this week. You certainly got me through a difficult time. I appreciate everything you do and the support and the help that you give. I know all members have constituency and legislative staff who assist them. Thank you, Merv.

Speaker, the bill is Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, and it is second reading. I did have a technical briefing from the minister's staff. It was a brief overview of some of the provisions of the bill. I understand what the intent is and the direction of the bill. Our party, as the third party, understands as well the nature of the bill, the thrust and intent.

As it is right now, we support the initial intent, because how could you not? It's a bill—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask members in the chamber to be a little quieter? I'm having difficulty hearing.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They're rowdy on Thursday afternoon, Speaker. Can you blame them? I know my speech here is not as riveting as some others that we've seen, certainly today.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I wasn't here to see that, but I don't plan on bringing it to that level.

Again, the bill is Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. The bill calls for long-term life cycle infrastructure planning, and my goodness, Speaker, who doesn't want or think it's a prudent thing, especially for the province of Ontario, to do long-term, properly planned infrastructure? It's a measure of accountability, transparency and prudence that I think we owe to our constituents in the province, infrastructure being one of the most integral components of the work that we do in connecting communities and moving people, goods and services around the province in an efficient and safe way.

It is a massively complex system that requires us to be continuously evaluating how we do it and how we can do it better. Technology evolves. There are systems that come into play which allow people to move more easily, quickly and safely that we always have to keep a keen eye on. Those, ultimately, require massive investments—we know they do—because a system put into place a decade ago can become not only antiquated, but also not actually fulfill the needs of the community in which it was purported to be or placed in in the first place, so all the more reason to plan properly and plan in advance.

What we find interesting is that the government doesn't need a law, at this very moment, to be able to do long-term infrastructure planning. If they want to do

long-term infrastructure planning, they can do long-term infrastructure planning. There is nothing that prohibits them from putting forward a 10-year plan, a 20-year plan or a 50-year plan. There is nothing that prohibits you from doing that.

We understand that it's an important component of any infrastructure proposal in legislation, but let's not put too much weight on the fact that you need a bill to do that. You can certainly do it, and we would expect that you would do that.

What we believe is that the major components of this bill, Bill 6, represent a response to various concerns raised by construction stakeholders regarding the impacts of bigger, larger, more complex AFP projects or, as they are more commonly known, public-private partnerships or P3s, and the bundling of traditionally financed projects.

I'm going to spend a considerable amount of time on that. I'll get back to it, but this is what we think is the real meat and potatoes of this bill, so to speak. It is an important component for the government to address because they have created, in their infrastructure spending, planning, budgeting and execution—they have bungled a lot of P3 projects. We need to have a keen eye on whether we are actually getting value for money out of those.

Back to the long-term planning: We've seen plans come and go out of this place. We've seen long-term infrastructure plans and promises for various projects, whether they be hospitals or transit plans. In fact, we've asked for long-term transit spending plans for years. The Big Move's Next Wave is still unfunded two and a half years after it was deemed a priority project, and the Big Move's First Wave keeps getting ripped up, rewritten and delayed to suit the government's political needs of the day.

We have seen planning and what you would think would be due diligence within big infrastructure projects launched, be very well marketed, have all the political juice squeezed out of them and the political capital expended only to be delayed, cancelled and ripped up. Will this bill prohibit what has been historically happening? I'm not really sure, because if you look at some of the mechanics of the bill, it has to do with regulation. It gives the minister an enormous amount of power under regulation, which is sort of a new mandate or a new direction under this government. We typically would have had provisions of bills come before the House in a really comprehensive way to be able to actually understand how they were going to be played out and acted on. This bill gives some very vague reference to the minister and ministry being able to, by regulation, do a bunch of different things, and I will get into that.

This government still to this day makes reckless infrastructure promises like, for instance, high-speed rail—really, a fantasy project that the government claims will only cost half a billion dollars, be ready within 10 years and cost as little as \$10 a ride. Now, I've heard that promise of high-speed rail three times over three

different election cycles. The last time, they forgot to actually connect it from London to Windsor, which is one of the more important corridors because it would then tap into the United States and their network of rail, which opens your rail commuter system to a population of around 300 million people. It makes it incredibly viable, but it wouldn't if you didn't create that one vital link between London and Windsor and the border that is Detroit and Windsor.

During the 2011 election, we conveniently reminded them that they should not forget Windsor, and they threw it in there ad hoc, right at the end of the announcement: "Oh, yes, Windsor too, as well." That certainly isn't long-term, prudent infrastructure planning. That's planning on a whim and a prayer, and doing it for the sake of the politics of it. We certainly don't think that's appropriate. In fact, if this is what the bill is aiming to avoid, then it is definitely supportable. But, again, we don't really see where that might not happen again.

Perhaps the government needs a law like this to force them to take their basic responsibilities seriously and plan infrastructure competently. So we support passing this bill, moving it on to committee to hear from those experts in the construction, engineering and public transit industries to give us what their best practices are, what their ideas are. As is always the case when we move bills to committee, we hear the most prescient and beneficial information from those who are on the ground actually working within these realms. Will this law be enough to ensure that evidence-based infrastructure spending does come from the government?

1650

Last December, the Auditor General revealed that the government spent an extra \$8 billion on public-private partnerships, with absolutely no evidence that they delivered the benefits that this government claims. The government spent \$8 billion based on solely anecdotal and ideological pursuits. It does bewilder me that an amount as large as \$8 billion can simply fly out of this place without any regard.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Indifference.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It does seem indifferent. We had executives from Infrastructure Ontario testify at the finance committee, and they were indifferent as well about the fact that the Auditor General highlighted an \$8-billion value that was overspent or wasted on P3 projects. It's a component of the government's planning when it comes to infrastructure that they have been relying on more and more as they see budgetary constraints applied to the treasury and to the finances of the province.

Do they actually equal out to giving good value for money? I would submit and we would submit as New Democrats that they truly don't. We understand that they may be a vehicle to finance projects. I won't discount that they exist and I won't discount that there are some times where they may prove to be valuable, but only done in the right way under the right metrics, and we're not seeing that through the metrics that this government is using.

Again, I point to the Auditor General's report, where the rationale is given that it is a massive transfer of risk between the public sector and the province of Ontario to the private sector. We defer that risk to the private sector; they take it on. They say, "We'll build this project." There are different constructs of how they can do it: design-build, design-build-finance, design-build-finance-maintain. It depends on the size of the project, I guess, and it depends on the ability of the proponent to deliver those services. However, what we see built into the matrix of risk analysis is that it is an inflated value of, I think, around three times what it would normally be—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Five.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Five times, thank you, to my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, who is an expert.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, no.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Unfortunately, she has had to become an expert because, as finance critic she sees those big values of dollars going out of this place, and she asks the question, "Why and how are we allowing that to happen?" We are using a risk matrix that inflates the value of that risk to the tune of a five-times multiplier.

If we are to do it under traditional models, not only are we saving on the borrowing, but that risk that is undertaken through traditional models of financing actually is something that we can control. The Auditor General says that we can even do it better. We understand the risk matrix a lot better than we did before, and we continue to learn. The expertise is in-house here, through the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure Ontario. Why are we wasting money by having the private sector finance these massive projects and ultimately take that capital and those profits out of this jurisdiction? That's just one aspect of the AFP model that we have issues with.

The other issue that I referenced at the beginning here was under bundling. What's happening, Speaker, is that Infrastructure Ontario is identifying projects which, I would assume, likely will be components built into what the 10-year plan will be, so will identify projects within the next 10 years that we find to be prioritized and in need. Instead of being stand-alone projects that have a value anywhere between zero and \$50 million, the province has been bundling them to be large values of money. You're getting into \$100-million, \$200-million, \$300-million projects that really don't allow for some of our smaller firms in the province to be able to bid, because they simply don't have the resources to be able to take on those types of projects. So that leaves a very small pool of contractors and experts in the province that are able to handle that.

More so, those that do exist are typically large multi-nationals that are financed by their home jurisdictions and actually receive some support to be able to buffer and to underbid other jurisdictions. We know that this happens with many of the Spanish firms currently working on projects—definitely in my area, on the Windsor-Essex Parkway. We also know that they are contracted to do the expansion of the 407.

Speaker, it leaves a lot of our local contractors out of the loop. It doesn't allow them to apply their expertise and it also doesn't allow them to benefit from local projects, from domestic projects. Ultimately, they pay their tax base to the province to be able to build these projects. They should at least have the ability to bid on some of them and apply their expertise. I can tell you, it would be a component of our plan through infrastructure planning: domestic procurement and domestic content. That's referenced a little bit in here, but it's also quite vague in terms of what that means when the government talks about what domestic content provisions would be built into a 10-year infrastructure plan.

The bill does some specific things. It requires that all broader public sector entities must consider a specified list of infrastructure planning principles when making decisions related to infrastructure. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs referenced those eight provisions. We understand them. I think they're reasonable and rational. However, they are vague in their application at this point because we really don't know. This is a shell of a bill. It doesn't prescribe specific direction.

The principles include things like, first, "Take a long-term view." Yes, take a long-term view; I would expect that. That's as common sense as it could get. Imagine if you took a short-term view: You would end up building projects and, just a short term later, you would end up cancelling them. Who would ever do that? Why would you ever do that in any of your infrastructure planning? It would be irrational to build something and then cancel it at a loss. I would imagine the government is looking to avoid those types of mistakes going forward.

Second, "Decision-makers should take into account the needs of Ontarians by being mindful of ... demographic and economic trends in Ontario." Of course, that's pretty common sense as well. We have trends of immigration and migration that would point to specific needs, going forward, that the government should prioritize.

The Minister of Infrastructure must periodically develop a 10-year infrastructure plan providing a description of the government's anticipated infrastructure needs and a strategy to meet those needs. Each long-term infrastructure plan must be made public. Again, a 10-year infrastructure plan—nothing prohibits the minister from doing that at this very moment. In fact, they have various long-term plans that aren't necessarily province-wide, but it is a rational, reasonable approach to planning for infrastructure.

What I would like to see is a component of how they intend on paying and a dedicated stream to pay for this 10-year plan, going forward, and something that is a balanced approach that doesn't leave them scrambling for cash for infrastructure projects in the province, where they have to sell off assets, long-held public entities that deliver good value and profit to the province. We don't want to do that, as is currently taking place with the proposed sell-off of Hydro One. We would like to see a more reasonable, balanced approach. I think the province

wants to see that as well, that budgetary considerations are given, that we be truthful with our communities, that, “Given our financial status and our financial position, here is a plan going forward,” not simply an ad hoc, sell-off-the-furniture-to-keep-the-house type of planning.

1700

“The government must consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for the construction of infrastructure assets.” Criteria include whether the project fits within municipal plans. I think we’ve heard from our colleagues at the municipal level, through AMO, OGRA and ROMA, that they do want enhanced dialogue and planning with the province to be able to budget accordingly and to plan accordingly as well.

They also would like to have increased or enhanced access to data when it comes to the viability of some of the infrastructure projects that we currently have—lifetime, lifespan, a whole host of data that they would require that would allow them to prioritize as well. Municipalities don’t necessarily have the ability that the province would have in terms of accessing and evaluating that, so I would hope that the government is able to work within that realm. It looks as though that might be the case.

“The government must require that certain numbers of apprentices be employed ... in the construction or maintenance” of infrastructure projects. The number would be prescribed in legislation. Many of my colleagues in the House know that, prior to being elected, I actually worked in the construction industry. Then I segued into the construction training industry, whereby I became the director of training for LIUNA Local 65. I was proud to develop our worker training centre, the level 1 and level 2 construction craft worker training centre, designated by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The facility that we operate out of Windsor has subsequently put through—by now, it has to be hundreds of well-trained, certified, safe, competent workers through the process, many of whom started off as apprentices. I understand the pipeline specifically in infrastructure and construction when it comes to apprentices.

This one gives me cause for concern. There are some vagaries there: Simply, how many apprentices? It says that you’re going to require that a certain number of apprentices be employed in the construction or maintenance of infrastructure projects. Well, there are already ratios that exist with the various trades. We’ve had very contentious debates in this House around the ratios and the College of Trades and the fact that now the college regulates the ratios and the parameters around training and enforces certification—all of those great things. However, what are you saying here? Are you saying that arbitrarily, through regulation, the minister can say, “Now we’re going to skew the ratio”? I think that will set a pretty terrible precedent. We know that ratios, when it comes to apprentices, are contentious within various trades. If the private sector out there, which does a lot of great work in bringing on apprentices

and putting a lot of effort and resources into training them—if they see that the government is simply skewing the ratio to fit their own benefit on a certain project by using more apprentices, then it defeats the entire argument that we fought for under the College of Trades. I need to hear more about that. It’s very, very vague.

We understand the importance of apprentices on projects, and definitely there would be a measure of pride knowing that the government puts a priority on bringing in young workers to build provincial, public projects. I can show you many of them that I worked on along the 401, and I point to them. I tell my kids, “Hey, Daddy built that”—along with a lot of colleagues, but I did. I know it’s there and I know the work that went into it. I understand the source of pride that young workers have when they are working on these types of projects. However, I also understand the whole nature of apprenticeships in the province and that they sometimes are looked at as cheap labour and can be used as cheap labour. We do not want to go down that road to show that the government is using apprentices at a higher ratio.

I’m getting head-nods from the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, so I know that he knows and that I know that he knows, and that’s a good thing.

I’ve got 30 minutes left on this one. Hold on to your seats. Buckle your seat belt.

The bill provides—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Name him, Speaker. Name him.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: What was that? I didn’t hear it. Is he razzing me? It’s too late in the day.

The bill provides the regulatory authority for the Minister of Infrastructure to establish regulation on almost any infrastructure issue imaginable. The minister must consult with relevant stakeholders before a regulation is made under the act—wow, what a good day to be the Minister of Infrastructure.

Let’s read that again, for the sake of the viewers at home and for the sake of the members in here who might not know that this is built into the provisions of Bill 6: The bill provides the regulatory authority for the Minister of Infrastructure to establish a regulation on almost any infrastructure issue imaginable. The minister must consult with relevant stakeholders before a regulation is made under the act. Well, thank you very much for consulting with us as relevant stakeholders, but ultimately, the minister can do what he or she deems necessary, without any oversight from this House, at least, and that gives us pause for great concern.

We have seen big infrastructure projects go sideways quickly in this province. I would think that we had learned our lesson from having the ability for ministers or governments to arbitrarily change the parameters of public investment, when it comes to these massive projects.

I would say gas plants; we can look at that. Does this avoid giving the minister the ability or the option to pull another gas plant? I think it opens the door even further. I wonder why it’s built in there. We have so much data and so much—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Evidence.

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—evidence, and also best practices, not only from this province but from other jurisdictions, on how to do it right.

It's unimaginable that the minister would require such broad abilities to deal with things—I guess, to presumably deal with things that are outside of his or her control. I need some more information on that; I think all members do, and I think even government members do, to be able to protect ourselves, going forward.

Speaker, those relevant stakeholders really are the construction groups that operate in our province, one of them being ORBA. A number of construction groups—the CDAO, ORBA and other affiliated groups—believe there are problems with infrastructure projects that are bundled, and the recent use of alternative financing projects, as administered by IO. These organizations are not particularly ideological. They believe that these tools can be useful, but they should be used where there is significant reason to do so.

I'll point to changes that were made in British Columbia. The province of BC has had some difficulty within some of their major P3 projects, and they have taken the step to increase that threshold to be able to trigger a P3, or even to consider P3 financing, to \$100 million, whereas ours today is \$50 million. It brings in a whole host of smaller projects that, typically, historically, would have been financed traditionally through normal procurement processes. But now they're open for potentially being P3s.

We would say, let's look at the lessons of British Columbia, and increase that value to \$100 million. It does make sense when the province is not able to finance a whole host of \$100-million projects or a handful of billion-dollar projects, to look at a different model of financing. However, when we have smaller thresholds, it gives us the ability to live off a credit card, to finance these things as we know we shouldn't, to kick the can down the road in terms of who is going to pay for them. We don't think it's necessarily the most responsible thing to do, as has been highlighted by the Auditor General very, very succinctly.

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The bill and the regulations that will be developed as a result of its passage are part of the response and the concerns by these industry groups. Their concerns are as follows: that the project bundling can significantly reduce the ability of smaller, local firms from participating in key Ontario infrastructure projects—I think I referenced that. The bigger the project, the less the likelihood that smaller firms, that all exist and operate in our communities and are viable entities and community partners—they don't get a chance to bid on that project. It just is completely out of their reach.

We have to look at the economics of that. When you've got local firms that are long-standing firms—a lot of these are mom-and-pop operations. It's a family firm and it's hard work. These aren't start-ups. You don't see construction companies as start-ups, mostly. They are

entities that have existed for a long time. They come with a lot of great experience and great resources for our communities. What we're doing is, we're cutting them out of public expenditure. That is unfortunate because they have a lot to offer us, because they ultimately drive on the roads that they're building. They live in the communities in which the bridges are built, so they have a vested interest.

When you don't have a company that has a vested interest, when they're coming in simply because they know that at a 30% premium on a P3, they can come in, build it and leave town, never to be seen again or until the next P3 project is up for tender—it's different with smaller contractors, and we certainly understand that.

The CDAO member companies have experienced significant problems on bundling issues with things such as the holdbacks of payments on these large projects, which also makes it difficult for small firms to manage cash flow. Payments are withheld from subcontractors until the contractors get paid, and then subcontractors don't have the same ability to wait for payments. There is an inherent unfairness built into some of the P3s as well that puts added, undue pressure on smaller firms that, really, they can't handle. That's how they make their money: hard-pressure tactics and the ability to do that. It's almost a Wild West when you're a sub on one of the P3 firms, because the idea is that they're going to squeeze every dime out of you and hold back payment if they don't get it.

I understand holdbacks when there are deficiencies on projects, but for the sake of simply putting the squeeze on your subcontractors, it's really unconscionable. There is lots of anecdotal evidence out there to support what I'm saying here. We hear it everywhere. The word is out, to tell you the truth. Smaller firms don't even want to bid on these P3 projects anymore.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They can't.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They can't. First of all, they don't have the ability. They don't have the financial reserves. They have the ability to do the work; they just don't want to put up with the grief built into them. They understand that the big multinational companies are going to apply the pressure to them to make it almost not worth it. We hope that at some point, during the debate of this bill and through committee, that that issue is addressed.

Most recently, Infrastructure Ontario has handled highway projects, namely the super-projects in Windsor and Essex, the Highway 407, the Eglinton LRT. These are projects worth billions of dollars and generally attract major international builders to Ontario. The CDAO concern here is that several of the big international players, particularly those from Spain, as I referenced, are subsidized by their federal governments—so their home federal jurisdictions are subsidizing them—allowing them to bid at a lower price than Ontario-based companies.

That's what is happening. You've got large multinationals that are doing international business. They receive a handsome subsidy from their home jurisdictions

to be able to go and capitalize on these projects worldwide. Is that wrong? I don't know. We certainly don't do it here, or do we? I haven't seen it. Who are we subsidizing? I think we subsidize the Spanish firms through giving them bloated and inflated contracts to deliver our infrastructure needs. That's a measure of subsidy when you're paying more for something than you really have to. They love it. They're laughing all the way to the bank.

The CDAO is in favour of competition. They want to ensure a viable marketplace for Ontario's small and medium-sized contractors and design professionals, architects and engineers. For example, Highway 69 was put on to the IO AFP project list with the total cost of highway updates to range between \$500 million and \$1 billion. In the past, the CDAO and ORBA would have been consulted on this, but in this case they were not. So you've got our regulated professionals and associations, which provide a lot of great information, that are now being cut out of the process. Is that by design through the P3 model? I think it very well may be, because what you would hear from them is that they have the ability, given the flexibility within these contracts, to deliver on time and on budget, as they have for the whole history of our province.

And the transfer of risk is always there, Speaker. We've always had provisions through Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to be able to hold back, to ensure that deficiencies are taken up and to hold companies to high standards that we regulate. There's nothing that prohibits the ministry from transferring that risk or mitigating the risk through projects, as the touted benefit is through P3s.

I point to Herb Gray Parkway, where we saw hundreds of girders replaced that were deficient. The government would say, "Well, yes, we found out that they were deficient, and the onus was on the company to replace them." Certainly they did that, but there is value in the fact that that project is now six months delayed directly as a result of that. We would also have to point to the fact that the deficiencies that were found in the girders were actually only found because we had government oversight, which is a normal practice within traditional models. So you're transferring risk, but you still have to keep an eye on these contractors. So you're doing the same thing.

It's a complex system, Speaker. I know it's difficult to explain it anecdotally, but the Auditor General does a great job, to the tune of \$8 billion that she has identified; something that I think the government still hasn't fully accepted, given the fact that they continue to drive forward on public-private partnerships.

Various associations have concerns about the apprenticeship provisions, as I referenced. The construction trades have been very concerned about the low apprenticeship completion rate, and see the act as an opportunity to develop comprehensive regulations to provide greater and more systematic use of apprentices on large infrastructure projects. I would hope they are brought into the fold to talk specifically about their role in

training and providing apprentices on construction sites. They have to, because they're the only game in town. I look forward to that. I look forward to hearing from them and seeing exactly what we can do to enhance the use—the fair use and justified use—of apprentices on these types of projects.

I think our concerns about the risk premium have been well articulated. According to a 2003 document from British Columbia, P3s reduce public sector risk by transferring to the private partner those risks that can be better managed by the private partner and reduce the potential for government cost overruns for unforeseen circumstances. However, a number that the Auditor General reports have found significant failures to transfer that risk in P3 projects, and the key question in Ontario is not whether the risk has been transferred but at what cost?

We know that we are paying a premium. It's a 30% premium. When money is cheap, the province can be borrowing cheap money at this point and saving a whole lot of money. However, they're dealing with a model that has an inflated risk matrix and one that, whether you like it or not, you're paying more for than you have to. How that's acceptable for the government is beyond me. How it's acceptable for proponents of P3s, members of the government who are proponents of P3s, is beyond me as well.

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As I said, I think there is a role for that model, not the one that we currently use, but a role for the private sector in some circumstances to put together a package. But it has to be so tight and examined and based on fact and data, and really empirical data that we don't find—we can't find and the Auditor General couldn't find—is being used in our current plan.

Speaker, we only have to point at other areas where the government has embarked on partnerships with the private sector to deliver really important services to the people of the province, whether it be gas plants, whether it be electronic health records, whether it be Ornge air ambulance, whether it be the SAMS computer program. These are things where the government has partnered up with the private sector, I guess, in order to mitigate the risk. The thought is that the private sector does it better and has less problems. Well, we see that that certainly isn't the case in at least these five instances. We are concerned that the more the government focuses on the use of P3s, the more we will go down that road.

Why is it so important that we look at the value of P3s? It's important because it was made clear by the Conference Board that "Most of the efficiency gains in a P3 procurement rest on a successful and cost-effective allocation of risks between public and private partners." In other words, without the transfer of the risk costs at a reasonable price, most P3 alternatives have a higher price tag than the conventional public model. That was data from the Conference Board of Canada.

Again, it's right here for us all to explore, to understand and to investigate. It's the Auditor General's annual report. I wish I could reference exactly that page, but I'm

sure if you gave our Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, a call, she would be happy to point you to her data and very clearly, without bias, show you why P3s in the province of Ontario at this very moment aren't providing the value for dollar that the government is touting them to have.

Specifically around the bill, there are some supportable provisions that are built into it. The government must consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for the construction of infrastructure assets, criteria on whether the project fits with municipal plans, as I referenced. They are subject to specifics in regulations that are yet to be developed.

The government must require that the architects and other design professionals relating to infrastructure be involved in the design of infrastructure assets. That seems quite reasonable. I think that's a big win for our architects in the province of Ontario, to be a component or to be a voice at the table when it comes to the design aspects of it. We have an incredible history of architectural design in school and professionals that have a lot to offer, and it's nice to see that their voices will be heard and their resources will be used.

There's the apprentices provision.

Speaker, we hear the government talk a lot about infrastructure these days. As I said earlier, it doesn't seem that they have a plan. They know they need to build infrastructure. They know that communities are asking for infrastructure. My colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills was able to list off about 10 different projects in the last five minutes of his discussion that are priorities for his region.

I know that Highway 3 in Essex, which links Leamington to the new border crossing, is a priority, something that is vital to our greenhouse industry, something that was started by my predecessor, the late Bruce Crozier. It's actually called Bruce Crozier Way, and it is built into the Southern Highways Program. However, it stands half completed at this moment.

We wonder what the government's intention is to actually fulfill not only their obligation and their promise to our community but to fulfill what actually Bruce Crozier started, which was the completion and the widening of Highway 3. It's something that I'm going to be taking up, along with members of my community, to champion: to call on the government to live up to their promise to deliver that new link for us. It's something that would position us well in the future and be an artery for the new Herb Gray Parkway for the rural areas of Essex county.

We would like to see that. However, without a plan, we don't know what the government's intentions are. The 10-year plan here, I think, is a novel and an admirable step. However, we would have liked to have seen that 10-year plan 10 years ago.

Hon. David Zimmer: What?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You could have done it 10 years ago. You could have it done 20 years ago. There was nothing stopping the government from developing a 10-year or 20-year plan 20 years ago.

Hon. David Zimmer: You have to be in government.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, you've been the government for 15 years, or whatever.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Twelve.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: However long it has been, you would have thought that maybe it would have been a priority for the government to start to actually plan, be prudent, and to give communities a clear sense of direction when it comes to infrastructure spending and prioritizing.

We'll see what happens. We have a deficit in rural Ontario when it comes to basic needs: roads, sewers, bridges, overpasses. Of course, rural schools and rural hospitals as well need to be supported and enhanced. When we hear the government tout "consolidation of schools" and "modernization of hospitals," those are keywords. We know that those are going to be cut and slashed and eliminated out of communities, which doesn't breed confidence into rural Ontario. It doesn't help sustain viable communities.

When you eliminate a birthing centre from a regional hospital or a local hospital it doesn't infuse confidence into young parents to move there. In turn, it doesn't give confidence to businesses to plant their roots there. There is a connectivity here. Also, when you start to have less babies in a certain area, you start to need less school space, so it makes your schools less viable.

I hope that those considerations are going to be built into the long-term aspect of the plan and the connectivity and the symbiotic relationship between our infrastructure and the people that use them and our economy. It's integrally important and we believe it can be done responsibly. We also believe that it can be financed responsibly as well.

We have measures of transparency and accountability built into our spending that provide the oversight. We give good value for dollars. You have to be truthful about it. You have to be up front. You have to tell your communities and your province that, "These things cost money, and we're going to ask for us all to pitch in to build them."

I think that our province is ready for that conversation. They're ready for some straight talk when it comes to financing the important needs of our community, not simply politicking and throwing ideas to the wind to see what sticks out there, throwing ideas across the—

Hon. David Zimmer: We don't do politics over here; we do policy.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm listening. I shouldn't be doing that. I should know better than to listen to the minister.

Hon. David Zimmer: We do policy, not politics.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They do policy, not politics. I have yet to see it, Minister, and I'm looking forward to it. Maybe this is the first step on your long road to policy rather than politics.

Speaker, I think I've beaten this one to death at this point. I talked about the risk matrix built into P3s. I've talked about the transfer of risk. As I've said, this bill—here's the title again: Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs

and Prosperity Act. How wonderful: infrastructure for jobs and prosperity. Yes, we need infrastructure, we need jobs and we all hope that we're going to be prosperous.

Hon. David Zimmer: Is your leader speaking this afternoon?

Where's their leader?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's funny. That's funny.

However, it is a shell of a bill. It is a vehicle, we hope, that allows for broad consultation a really important subject, an important topic. It's one that we hope the government takes seriously and doesn't continue to infuse politics above policy in it, because there's so much that's vague in here, and it gives them the ability, through regulation, to really do the politics as they know how in specific and strategic areas, rather than for the benefit of the province as a whole.

Speaker, with that, I'm going to leave a little bit of time on the clock. I'll cede my time, and I appreciate the attentive nature of all the members in the House, specifically the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. He's always a great listener of mine.

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

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very happy to talk about the proposed Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. I can't think of two items, jobs and infrastructure, that rate much higher in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East than just that. When I do tele-town halls and do the little survey of what's most important to my constituents, along with transit, of course, seniors' care, health care, jobs are right up there, particularly because the unemployment rate is very, very high in Durham, and the unemployment rate for youth in Durham is even higher than the unemployment rate for youth in the entire province. So it's a big concern of mine and of my constituents. But we do hope with good infrastructure planning that there will be more jobs in Durham region.

I also represent Scarborough East. That's a smaller part of my riding, but it's also a very important part of my riding as well.

There's lots of things going on in Durham in terms of infrastructure potential, with the development of the Seaton lands. Also, there is a proposal for a multi-tourism destination called Durham Live. So I think a bill like this that encourages a principled and evidence-based approach to long-term infrastructure planning and supports job creation is very, very important to the economic growth of our province and locally for all of us in our ridings. Like I said, I can't think of anything that's much more important to the community I represent and the region I live in.

I'm looking forward to the continued discussion of this bill.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I did listen very attentively to the member from Essex, partly because I was here all alone on my side of the House and I had nobody to chat with.

I just want to say that really it is about focusing on results and focusing on what makes sense. What I'm starting to realize after just over a year in this House is that this side of the House seems to really focus on science, on data, on evidence-based decisions, whereas the government side of the House seems to really focus on wishful thinking—"We'll throw something in the air, and we hope that it lands, splat, and can somehow create a job"—without showing us the evidence or the strategy to really get some support from this side of the House.

I just want to mention a couple of projects in my riding of Thornhill; one is subways. The residents of Thornhill, Unionville, Markham—even now all the way in Newmarket—have been anxiously waiting to see the Yonge subway expanded to Richmond Hill. All of a sudden it was decided that a subway, which had never been discussed, would go up to Vaughan, up Jane Street to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre that is going to be built—it's still not built—in the middle of big box stores, fields, industry; nobody really lives there. Everybody is wondering why the subway would go up there. People have remarked to me, "Is it because it's a Liberal-held riding, and we're in a Conservative-held riding?" I say, "Well, you're going to have to speak to the people in government who do the planning."

That subway is once again delayed. I would have preferred to see the Spadina line go up to York University and then make its way to the airport. It would have completely caused us to realize that we did not need to have an express Pearson train route, because we could have had a subway system, if it was managed efficiently, to get downtown quickly—

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think my colleague actually did an admirable job of highlighting our concerns about the bill and addressing some of the current situations that this province faces on infrastructure.

It's really interesting; today, of course, the government came out with this plan to sell off 60% of Hydro One. For hundreds of years, governments have been able to figure out how to fund infrastructure, but now we have to sell this important asset, which is incredibly short-sighted.

What they have before them is a plan. The Auditor General accurately highlighted some inefficiencies in the way this province is procuring infrastructure. What I like about this bill, though, is it says that they want the government to apply some principles. Well, the principle that we would like to see applied to the way infrastructure is funded is actually empirical evidence. The Auditor General found, as the government made the case

around risk transfer, that no empirical evidence actually existed.

In fact, from page 197, she says: “For 74 infrastructure projects (either completed or under way) where Infrastructure Ontario concluded that private-sector project delivery under the AFP ... would be more cost-effective, we noted that the tangible costs (such as construction, financing, legal services, engineering services and project management services) were estimated to be ... \$8 billion higher than they were estimated to be if the projects were contracted out and managed by the public sector.”

When Infrastructure Ontario came to the committee and the member and I had an opportunity to challenge them, they could not justify the bias, the tendency to actually always find that P3s were in favour.

Instead of selling off Hydro One, they could actually adapt the way they procure infrastructure in the province of Ontario and the savings, going forward, would be immense. There is no need whatsoever to sell Hydro One to fund infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I had the opportunity to listen to the member. I was seated behind the speaker here and I appreciate the remarks that the member from Essex had to say today.

This bill was introduced back in July of last year. It's 10 months old. The government has a plan. We've had that plan at least since the last budget before the election last year. The plan is simply to build up our infrastructure and keep not just roads but bridges, subways and whatever else in good working order. This bill forces infrastructure projects to be prioritized.

I remember my time on Scarborough city council. I chaired a works committee from 1991 to 1997—six years. What I noticed was that the province—it started with the Bob Rae government, then when the Mike Harris government came in it got even worse. The funding and the prioritizing of projects and infrastructure, at least in Scarborough and Metro Toronto, was just disheveled, totally disorganized; it was in that case. Before that, things were kind of organized properly and the province would really help municipalities a lot when it came to infrastructure and they worked together. But eventually they weaned themselves off it.

By the final year of the Bob Rae government and the first year of the Mike Harris government, the money stopped coming to the city of Scarborough. It was almost like downloading again.

This bill is trying to, again, make sure that things are prioritized and that municipalities get the proper funding for infrastructure projects, and it sets out a plan which makes a lot of sense. I'm supporting the bill, and I'm looking forward to it going to committee as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now recognize the member for Essex. You have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thanks to my colleagues in the House who com-

mented on my lead: the member for Thornhill, the Minister of Community and Social Services—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Children and Youth Services, and women's issues.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —Children and Youth Services; somebody gave me some terrible information on that one, sorry—the member for Scarborough Southwest and the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, my colleague who sat on the finance committee with me. We both sat there when we heard testimony from Infrastructure Ontario.

She puts it so eloquently; I'm a little bit more brash. If you want money to fund your infrastructure, stop doing what you're doing. It's pretty clear. It's \$8 billion—eight billion bucks—that the Auditor General has highlighted for you. How does that not give you great consternation that it is out of the door? It's gone, vaporized. Why is that not a problem for you? It boggles the mind. If you were to just do that, to be more prudent in your use of public-private partnerships and to understand that you're throwing money out the window, my goodness, you would not have to sell off valuable assets like Hydro One. We could maintain that as a public entity.

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I don't understand the economics around it. I see it right here. Do you not believe the Auditor General? Do you not believe the data she has put forward? It's unbiased, it's unpartisan, third party, reputable. You named her, so you must trust what she says. Eight billion dollars could be used to finance those infrastructure projects that are going to fit into this 10-year plan. Let's do that. Let's stop doing what is currently being done and do it with more of a prudent approach.

Speaker, I really appreciate the ability to speak on this. I appreciate the attentiveness of the members in the House. I wish everybody a wonderful weekend and thank you all for the opportunity.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to be sharing my time with the member for Beaches–East York, the member for Mississauga–Brampton South and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

I'm just going to take a few minutes because I want to talk about, really, only one part of this bill. In the last three years, I've had five different ministries that I've been responsible for, and I was the minister at the time this bill was drafted. There's something in this bill that I think is one of the most important things that we're going to pass, and it's something that was a great fight at the time to get into the bill.

There are sections in this bill that deal with design. It says that any project over \$50 million will, by default, have an architect and a design team involved in it, and that any project under \$50 million that a municipality or the minister deems as being critically important or having design significance also can have an architect in it.

With all due respect to other professions, the absence of architects in public works projects is stark in this province. We have built more formulaic, ugly cement structures—even through many of our mid-sized cities, the great bridges that used to be beautiful and dynamic are now formulaic concrete structures. In my mayor days—and I hate to go back there, but when you've been mayor of a large city, it's sort of a defining moment in your life—there were bridges, and some of them were interesting. The opposition likes to refer to the million-dollar toilet in Winnipeg, and I'd like to take a moment to say that there is no million-dollar toilet. The toilet cost about 150 bucks. It was actually a sewer line on a pedestrian bridge connecting St. Boniface and Winnipeg so people could flush their toilets on either side of the river. That's what actually cost a million dollars. So that whole thing has been funny.

But it was interesting, because that was the argument used by people who were upset that this bridge had a restaurant on it, and it has now won more international design awards than any other public works project ever built in Canada. If you go to the city of Winnipeg—it was so controversial, no one ever opened it. It never had a dedication ceremony. I think it's the only bridge built in Canadian history that never had a dedication. It's on the cover of Étienne Gaboury's work, his life's work, the architect who designed it. You cannot go to Winnipeg now and find, from the chamber of commerce, any company that doesn't use that shot of the city across that bridge.

When you look at the Ontario College of Art and Design building here—but, you know, the inspiration for this was a Toronto idea. Thomas Taylor—if you've ever read *In the Skin of the Lion*, Thomas Taylor was the architect on the Prince Edward viaduct, which we sometimes call the Bloor Street viaduct now, and Edmund Burke, not the philosopher but the architect, designed that. That building was the first project of R.C. Harris, one of Toronto's most famous commissioners of public works. I know my friend the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a big fan of that tradition in the city of Toronto of high-quality design. That is a spectacular piece of work and probably the last one, other than the water treatment plant that Harris built, that actually involved an architect and a designer.

What this bill will do is it will bring architecture, designers, environmental design back into it, because I would like to see Toronto and Ontario's other cities as the most beautiful.

What's really interesting is that good design doesn't cost any more or less than bad design. As a matter of fact, what has happened in the cases of some of the projects that have been done here and in other places is, you see as much as a 40% or 50% increase in the value of property. If you live in San Francisco and you have a view of the Golden Gate Bridge, that view cost you a \$100,000 premium. If you live in New York and you're looking at the Brooklyn Bridge, that property has a much higher premium than even that.

We know that what you see out the window of your office or what you see out of the window of your home is one of the biggest drivers of tax-based growth. I discovered this, Mr. Speaker, when an ugly piece of infrastructure fell down. The Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco collapsed in an earthquake. All of a sudden, my friend at the time when I was mayor of Winnipeg, Mayor Gavin Newsom, who was mayor of San Francisco—they had a city council meeting. I know some of you here are former city councillors. You can imagine this good news. The city treasurer walked into the city council meeting and said, “Guess what's happened? The tax base assessment of downtown San Francisco has jumped 300%.”

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm almost finished.

If my friend the former city councillor and member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore had walked into Toronto city council one day, and Joe Pennachetti came in and said, “Guess what, Councillor Milczyn? Our tax base in downtown Etobicoke just grew 300% in three years”—because when the Embarcadero collapsed, property values went through the roof because everyone had a great view. You can imagine if we took down the Gardiner, for example, which is a similar kind of thing—at least in my part of town. I wouldn't do it in your part of town. But that is formative.

Nobody else in Canada at the provincial level has ever done anything like this. Whoever the next Minister of Infrastructure is when this bill is passed, we are going to be able to set groundbreaking design standards and truly make our cities the Parises of North America. I hope that's not lost on people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you very much for this opportunity. Let me correct: Our fourth speaker today will be the member from Newmarket–Aurora. We won't have the pleasure of the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport for this debate today. I'm sure he'll be happy to weigh in another time.

I'm delighted to be speaking on Bill 6, the proposed Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. This is an important piece of legislation. I'm so tempted now to make my way to Winnipeg so I can enjoy a great meal on a bridge with a very functional sewer line that helps people flush their toilets. It's an important thing, and I appreciate very much that being brought to the House's attention—

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: That's for after dinner.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Maybe for after dinner.

For me, what this bill is doing is it's breaking the cycle of partisan politics. So often, ministers of government will be planning for a short-term political cycle and not putting the effort into long-term planning so that we get the infrastructure right as we move forward.

Particularly, it allows other entities, like municipalities and the federal government, to see what we think is important, what we're doing in a long-term plan, so that

we can work outside of the silos of our individual partisanship so we can plan for the long term.

We've seen this locally with our LHINs. We had a meeting recently where the LHINs, the local health integration networks, were seeing how they need to be working long-term with the municipalities on planning decisions, so as we build up large structures for people coming to live in the city, there are health services available to them, in the same way that we know there have to be educational services available, and a lot of other things that have been planned for in the long term. It's absolutely important.

Now, had previous administrations in this House taken a more long-term planning approach, we wouldn't be facing some of the deficit crises in infrastructure that we face in the country today, particularly here in the province of Ontario. The previous government spent so little money encouraging and increasing infrastructure here that we were left with serious infrastructure deficits as they tried to balance the books. They balanced them on the back of infrastructure deficits.

I think particularly of the hydro infrastructure of our province, which was in a sorry state of repair when our government came into power 11 years ago—a sorry state of repair. That's why we are investing the new money, the \$130 billion that's referenced, but we are doing it as part of a long-term strategic plan. We would not have had the collapse and the massive blackout that we had a number of years ago had we had better hydro infrastructure in place. While the hydro delivery system has been serving the province of Ontario fairly well, we're in a phase of renewal, and we've spent money. That is partly what is causing us now to have increased hydro rates: repairing the infrastructure deficit that was left to us by the party opposite.

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We see the same thing in transportation infrastructure. The previous administration built no more subways, but we're moving forward with an aggressive plan to rebuild the public transit infrastructure in the GTA. We're the ones who put the shovels in the ground and got the subway going up to York University and further. We're the government that is doing all of Eglinton. The previous administration, when they came to building infrastructure, filled in the hole that we're now excavating again on Eglinton. They filled it in because they were not prepared to spend the money on infrastructure which is so sadly needed.

I know many are concerned about selling off Ontario Hydro in order to fund this infrastructure, but let's be very, very clear: Every dollar of new funding in infrastructure is going to return 13% to 15% in GDP. It will have a three-times benefit in jobs and new economic development. We're going to take an asset, and we're going to raise capital on that asset which is going to have a return to investors of a reasonable but marginal rate, and we will get much greater infrastructure development and economic prosperity by investing in the infrastructure that is so critical to us moving forward in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important act about long-term planning, and we're moving forward with it. We hope the members of the parties will come to the table and support it as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Mississauga–Brampton South.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 6. I feel this bill is a good example of the legacy that our government is creating for all Ontarians. It is about investment in all of our lives and for the future. As we all know, infrastructure is essential to the health, strength and sustainability of every community, in communities like my own, Mississauga–Brampton South, which has grown very quickly and has a plan to continue to grow. Rapid transit along Dixie Road, Tomken Road or Eastgate Parkway; the Hurontario LRT; or any other projects that connect to the transit system are making my community readily accessible. We are building up our economic strengths and making it a green place to live.

But even older communities in parts of Ontario that are not growing very quickly, such as rural areas or outlying cities, can find renewal through modern infrastructure. Roads, highways, bridges, transit, modern water and sewer systems all improve life in Ontario by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Transportation is one of the major sources of greenhouse gas. Transportation is an important area of focus for our government as we have already taken historic action to close Ontario's coal-fired power plants, which spewed emissions. We know we must continue to do more.

Greenhouse gases, especially as they are created by human activity, are already contributing to climate change, which is a concern of mine as a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment. Climate change is leading to severe weather phenomena throughout Ontario, such as the ice storm that hit the GTHA in 2013 or last summer's torrential rains and even harmful algal blooms that can harm human lives. The phenomena also damaged old infrastructure. It simply needs to be replaced or upgraded.

In addition to making Ontario a better and more accessible place for people to live and reducing society's carbon footprint, investing in infrastructure is very important to our province's economic strength.

Bill 6, if passed, would require the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure to create a 10-year plan for infrastructure, which is undeniably needed. Our planning needs to ensure that our core public services, which are very important to our well-being, are reliable.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that so highly values investment in Ontarians. Bill 6 is important to our commitment to invest over \$130 billion in infrastructure over 10 years. This will support Ontarians in every corner of our province, from Windsor to Ottawa and from Mississauga to Attawapiskat.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, each dollar invested in public infrastructure in Ontario raises

our GDP by \$1.14 in the short term. What does this mean? It means that it would promote our economic competitiveness, job creation and training of skilled workers.

In closing, I strongly feel that this proposed legislation is sound economic policy, it's sound environmental policy and it's sound social policy. I urge all members of this House to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am particularly delighted to speak to the proposed Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, known as Bill 6. Before I get too far, I just want to pull us back to a number of the key points that this bill will address.

Some quick facts, if I may: The bill builds on Building Together, which was released in 2011, the long-term plan for Ontario's infrastructure investments. It's really meant to provide clarity, sustainability and greater predictability in infrastructure policies and to keep Ontario economically competitive.

Since August 2012, the province has also been implementing the Municipal Infrastructure Strategy. A cornerstone of this strategy is asset management. It's essential for strategic, evidence-based and long-term infrastructure planning, which is what this legislation is about.

Ontario's new 10-year economic plan includes over \$130 billion in public infrastructure investments that will support over 110,000 jobs, on average, each year in construction and related industries.

Finally, if passed and proclaimed, the proposed legislation would build on this work by ensuring that current and future governments regularly prepare long-term infrastructure plans and continue to improve how the province prioritizes and addresses infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, I think all of these points are very important. In a previous life, I was a town councillor in the wonderful town of Aurora, now part of my riding of Newmarket–Aurora. I know that I pushed hard for long-term strategic planning, especially in infrastructure. While our town was particularly fortunate to have done some good planning, I looked around at other communities and heard some of the pending horror stories because of the lack of planning that they had undertaken

both physically, for the replacement of their physical infrastructure, and for the funding of that infrastructure.

I was a councillor in August 2012, when the province implemented the Municipal Infrastructure Strategy. I was chair of our town's economic development committee back in June 2011, when Building Together was brought forward. I was delighted to see that the province was moving ahead with some very constructive and well-planned thinking on what we're going to do about infrastructure.

In my riding, Mr. Speaker, you can't talk about infrastructure without talking about transit. Transit, especially GO trains and GO buses, was one of the top three issues that constituents in the riding of Newmarket–Aurora talked to me about when I was knocking on their doors both as a councillor in years gone by and when I was running for MPP. Improved transit will not only improve the lives of the residents of Newmarket–Aurora who must commute to Toronto by getting them to work faster and getting them home faster so they can participate more in the life of our community, but more importantly, it's our firm belief that that infrastructure investment will ultimately lead to significant economic development in the riding of Newmarket–Aurora because it will allow businesses that are currently in very high-priced real estate in Toronto to migrate some of their secondary offices and buildings to outside of that downtown core. Communities around Toronto will benefit when they have this type of infrastructure in place.

I wanted to comment on the promotion of design excellence in public works. There's a fantastic building in Aurora called the Church Street School. It dates back to the mid-1800s.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Is that where I was?

Mr. Chris Ballard: That's where Minister MacCharles was recently. It's a beautiful building. When it was constructed in the 1800s, it was the tallest building north of this building—a fantastic design.

I see my time is up. Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Second reading agreed to.....

3580

**Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act,
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Second reading agreed to.....

3580

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Second reading agreed to.....

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