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Monday 11 April 2016

Lundi 11 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 avril 2016

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have Grenadian heritage. Joining us here today is the consul general and the ambassador for the Grenadian diaspora, Mr. Derrick James, and Geraldine Stafford. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a group of representatives joining us today from Parkinson Canada, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of Canadians living with Parkinson's. They're here today to meet with policy-makers and to celebrate World Parkinson's Day. Please join me in welcoming them.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome several people from my riding of Barrie to the Legislative Assembly today. First I'd like to welcome Alicia Eliot and Margaret-Anne Gillis and their grade 10 careers and civics classes from Barrie Central Collegiate Institute.

I would also like to welcome John Adamich, a student from the University of Toronto's faculty of medicine.

Mr. Todd Smith: This is Prince Edward–Hastings day here at Queen's Park. We do have a reception planned from 5 until 7 this afternoon, so after the festivities we welcome you to committee rooms 228 and 230 to see some of the great things that are produced and manufactured in Prince Edward–Hastings.

I do have a number of guests here from the Belleville and District Chamber of Commerce that I'd like to introduce this morning, in no particular order: Derrick Morgan; Peter Kempenaar; Rosi Ouellette; Suzanne Hunt; Tim Farrell, who's the president of the chamber; Luc Fournier; Susan Walsh; Racheal Sudds; Mike Hewitt; and Bill Saunders, who's the CEO of the chamber of commerce. We welcome them to question period this morning.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: On behalf of MPP Brad Duguid, I would like to welcome the parents of Diluk Ramachandra, the page captain today; his mother, Ruwani Ramachandra; and his father, Mr. Ramachandra, who are going to be here today to see their son in action.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of all members, I would like—although he has not yet arrived to join us, to be embarrassed—to congratulate the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on the indeterminate anniversary of his 39th birthday, which occurred while we were away.

Mr. Grant Crack: It gives me a great pleasure to wish a happy birthday to my executive assistant, Mr. Andrew Logan, who has been doing a wonderful job for us. On behalf of Andrea as well, she would like to say happy birthday.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Good morning. I just wanted to introduce today, in the galleries, the mother and father of our page Jack Beverly, from the great riding of Scarborough Southwest. I think the mother, Karen Beverly, and the father, Rob Beverly, are in the gallery today. I just wanted to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today Haris Vaid, from the Ontario medical students.

Mr. Todd Smith: I neglected to introduce a very, very important person from Prince Edward–Hastings who's here today. Sandie Sidsworth, from the Canadian Mental Health Association office in our region, is here. It's great to welcome Sandie.

Also, he can't make it down right now. He's broadcasting from the Legislature today. Lorne Brooker will be joining us for question period from the Lorne Brooker Show on 800 CJBQ.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You've kind of got that radio announcer style down pat.

The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted that Runnymede Collegiate Institute is in the House today, watching question period. Be good.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I agree.

The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: We have some special guests in the members' east gallery that I would like all members to welcome. We have Krystina Waler, who's a leader in the Ukrainian-Canadian community and with the Canada Ukraine Foundation.

We have Alla Nyzhnykovska and her son, Mykola. Mykola is a victim of the war in eastern Ukraine. He and his brother were playing in eastern Ukraine when they discovered a hand grenade that had not gone off. It did explode, and he lost both legs and a hand. He has since been receiving treatment from Canadian doctors in Ukraine and here in Canada. That's thanks to the Canada Ukraine Foundation and the generous financial support of the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

Remarks in Ukrainian.

Please join me in welcoming Mykola to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the Liberals just won't stop. The Premier claimed that she's interested in cleaning up the fundraising mess she created. Yet last week we learned that Apotex used a by-election loophole to donate nearly $10,000 to the Liberals, and what does the Premier do? She pops by for a visit at Apotex.

I wouldn't be alarmed by a few small donations, but this is the same company that donated nearly $200,000 to the Liberal Party. Can the Premier guarantee this House that by taking Apotex's money, it has never affected a government policy decision?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am very much looking forward to a constructive meeting with the leaders of the opposition this afternoon. I'm not going to presuppose what will take place at that meeting, but this whole discussion about the fundraising rules is one that we need to have. I said last June that it's something that needed to happen. I look forward to building on changes that we have already made, and I look forward to input from the leaders of the opposition on legislation that we will bring forward in the spring.

I think there's a broad consensus that we need to make a transition away from corporate and union donations. I look forward to the input from the leaders of the opposition on what that transition might look like.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier—and my question on Apotex has not been answered. It's one thing to receive a small donation, but the Liberals received nearly $200,000 from this one company. What does this get this company? How about $650,000 a year in drug purchases from the Ministry of Health?

1040

Does this not merit a public inquiry? I don't understand why the government is running from a public inquiry if they have nothing to hide.

I'll ask again. To the Premier: Has this almost $200,000 that the Liberal Party has taken affected a government policy decision related to Apotex? Please answer the question: yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, it has not. In fact, political donations do not buy policy decisions in my government. The innuendo that—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The member from Haldimand–Norfolk will withdraw.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Any innuendo or suggestion to the opposite is false. That is the fact.

I've always been very clear that the decisions we make in my caucus and in my cabinet are made based on evidence. They're based on the best interests of the people of Ontario, to the best of our ability.

I would say to the member opposite that again, I'm looking forward to our discussion this afternoon. I look forward to their input.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: If this is all smoke and it's not fire, then the Premier would embrace a public inquiry.

There are plenty of drug companies that receive money from the Liberal government, so what else may Apotex benefit from? In 2011, the government, led by then-Health Minister Matthews, appealed a court ruling that would allow pharmacies to have their own private labels. This would have allowed pharmacies to sell their own drugs for the same price, but not the drugs mandated by the province, like Apotex's.

At the time, the Globe and Mail called the decision to appeal the ruling "a minor mystery." They went on to suggest that perhaps the Liberals were "looking out for ... Apotex, the largest domestic manufacturer."

Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: Can the Premier assure us that these donations are not affecting the government's decisions? Will she embrace a public inquiry to show she has confidence in the manner in which they have led this government—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting to see the newfound interest that the member apparently has in fundraising, because I have here a list of his donations during the leadership campaign. They're absolutely astounding. He broke an all-time record.

He said, first of all, that as soon as he got here, he was interested in fundraising—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, it's now the second time.

I'm going to ask the member to leave his list on his desk.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll read it from here, Mr. Speaker.

An all-time record in fundraising for a leadership candidate was what was achieved by the leader of the official opposition, who said, when he got here, that he was astounded by the fundraising rules. Yet he took

advantage of those fundraising rules to raise well over $1.6 million for his leadership campaign—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Time is up.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. While this government has been busy attending secret $6,000 fundraising dinners, I've been touring hospitals and meeting with front-line workers across this province. Just this past weekend, I was in Windsor. I was told first-hand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I expect some civility here, and I'll get it one way or another.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I was told first-hand the impact of this government's mismanagement on health care in Windsor: 120 nurses are gone because of this government, and $20 million cut to Windsor Regional because of this government. The budget promised one thing, but what we're seeing in reality is very, very different.

I can tell you: I didn't charge a single red cent to meet with nurses in Windsor. I wanted to hear their concerns; I wanted to hear their stories.

My question for the Premier: Will the Premier meet with the nurses in Windsor without charging them $6,000 a plate?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the Leader of the Opposition is fully aware that I meet with people all over the province—consistently, Mr. Speaker—from every sector.

We're committed, on health care, to making sure that people in Ontario have the right care, that they have it in a timely way and that they have it in the right place. To that end, funding for Windsor hospitals has increased by $124 million. That's a 47% increase during our tenure as government. In fact, just this fiscal year, $7 million was provided to help Windsor Regional Hospital with budget pressures and to help the transition process from a registered-nurse model to a registered-practical-nurse model.

That is work that is going on in other parts of the province. The focus of those funds was to ensure that the reduction of FTEs occurred through attrition and retirement and not through layoffs. So it's a different model. There is a transition. There is, overall in health care, a transition going on. We are working with the health care sector in every community across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: Those are talking points to justify a $20-million cut to Windsor Regional Hospital. But I can tell you, it's not just Windsor. Last month, St. Joseph's health centre in London was forced to cut 49 full-time positions and 12 transitional care beds. Just last month, LifeLabs announced they were closing 15 patient service centres. The CEO of LifeLabs said they had to close the centres because the demand for testing had increased but funding had not.

Patients will struggle to get the testing they need done. The government has created this situation, forcing communities to close clinics and doctors' offices; they have fired nurses and front-line health care workers.

So my question is: Now that the Premier has demanded that the Minister of Health not have private, high-level fundraising dinners, will he now have the time to support physicians and nurses and stop closing labs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, let me just reinforce that the way we make policy decisions on this side of the House has nothing to do with political donations, even though the innuendo on the other side of the House would suggest that. It's simply false.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the Leader of the Opposition does not talk about is the rehiring of nurses. He doesn't talk about what's happening in one part of the sector. We've increased the percentage of nurses working full-time by 13.9% in our term of government—since 2003. There are now 26,300 more nurses working in nursing in Ontario since we took office. There has been a massive influx of nurses into the system, and we are working with communities around the province to make sure that service is delivered adequately.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: Once again, if the Premier wasn't petrified of a public inquiry, she would welcome this sunshine, this spotlight, on this topic.

We all know that doctors have been without a contract for two years. During that time, Liberals have unilaterally cut $815 million from physicians. Further, the Minister of Health won't even meet with physicians. So my question is: Is it because the doctors didn't ante up for the Liberal fundraising calls? How many $6,000 dinners will it take for the Premier and the Minister of Health to actually meet with our physicians in the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health is very much engaged with the OMA. We would like very much to have an opportunity to sit down at the table and work out an arrangement with them.

The Leader of the Opposition may not remember, but this is the highest-paid group of physicians in the country. They have every right to earn a good wage, but the reality is that we need that opportunity to sit down with them. We're open to that. We want to work this out,

and the Minister of Health is engaged with them on a regular basis to try to get that opportunity to have the conversation with them.

1050

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. New Democrats fully support the elimination of corporate and union donations, but we know there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. Later today, I'm going to be proposing to the Premier—and the Leader of the Opposition as well—that this Legislature initiate a transparent, independent and non-partisan process to make recommendations on new rules for financing political parties and the electoral process, and new rules for governing third-party advertising and elections as well.

Will this Premier actually support a process that will be truly transparent, independent and non-partisan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I very much look forward to the conversation this afternoon, as I already said to the Leader of the Opposition. I look forward to meeting with both leaders.

We are going to be bringing legislation forward in the spring. We are going to propose that we have an extended period of consultation, that the standing committee that is working on that piece of legislation travel the province and there be adequate and ample opportunity for people in this province to have input, so we get that legislation right.

But I think there's a high degree of agreement that we need to move forward. We need to catch up with other jurisdictions that have already changed the rules. I said last June that we needed to do this. I look forward to moving ahead with this and I look forward to the conversation this afternoon with the leaders.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Andrea Horwath: When Premier Bill Davis was faced with reforming how Ontario funded elections back in 1970, he asked a tri-partisan commission to make recommendations because he said he wanted to create "an atmosphere above and beyond public doubt, suspicion and cynicism." But this Premier appears to want to have all the power to make these decisions in her office. Why is she pushing to create a system that's open to doubt, suspicion and cynicism?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Quite to the contrary, the reason I've asked the leaders of the opposition to come in to have a meeting with me is to talk with them—and I understand that they're very interested in the subject, and they have input that they can bring from their benches and beyond. We will then have a very full discussion of that legislation in the public realm. That's what I will be proposing this afternoon.

There are some specific issues in terms of transition into the ban on corporate and union donations, some of the timing and how we should manage those. I'm looking forward to hearing their input when we meet this afternoon.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When new financing rules were passed in Ontario in 1975, an election finances commission was created. It had representatives nominated by political parties, non-partisan benchers from the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer and a chair put forward by the Lieutenant Governor of the province. It created a system that was stable for almost 25 years.

Then, in 1998, an order to eliminate the non-partisan expert commission came right from the office of Premier Mike Harris. The Premier has acknowledged that she already is writing the new rules without any consultation. Why is she following the example of Mike Harris?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am very interested in an open process. I'm very interested in moving ahead, but I believe that there is a fair degree of consensus in terms of the direction that we need to move. I also believe that to layer process on top of process and to delay the final decision does not make sense.

I think we need to move to make the decisions that have been discussed in public for some time and that other jurisdictions have already adopted. We need to take those steps to move expeditiously. I look forward to our meeting this afternoon so we can get started.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. When Mike Harris decided get rid of this non-partisan system by fiat from the Premier's office, the current member for St. Catharines called it an "anti-democratic strategy, hatched in the back rooms of the Premier's office." John Gerretsen, the former Liberal member for Kingston and the Islands, said, "What's happening here is that the governing party that happens to be in power at any one time is going to have a distinct advantage above the normal advantages of incumbency." Former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty said that there are "simple rules of fairness.... You can't change the rules of the game without the consent of all the players involved."

So why is this Premier hatching plans in the back-rooms of the Premier's office instead of through a non-partisan process that gets Ontarians to buy in?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I would say to the leader of the third party: Why is she not talking about the substance of the changes that need to happen? Why is she not putting forward ideas about how she thinks the system needs to change? Because that actually is the issue.

Instead of talking about how we can have more process that will actually delay the final decision, why is the leader of the third party not putting forward her ideas on what the transition should be between the current system and the changes, banning corporate and union do-

nations? Why is the leader of the third party not talking about third-party advertising? Why is she not talking about the kinds of changes that she would like to see? Those are the subjects that I'm looking forward to having a conversation about this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Toronto Star weighed in at the time as well. They said, "The rules governing elections have been changed only when there has been a consensus among the three parties in the Legislature." Maclean's wrote: "For 25 years, election financing bills in Ontario have been tabled with all-party consensus, but Ontario Premier Mike Harris tossed aside that tradition." And Richard Brennan, who at that time was working for my own Hamilton Spectator, wrote: "The government broke tradition yesterday by tabling proposed legislation affecting the Election Finances Act without first getting all-party consent."

Why does this Premier believe that she alone should be writing the rules?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't believe that. I don't believe that for a minute. I think that there has already begun a broad public discussion. I think that there is a fair degree of consensus on where we need to go. I have heard from certainly the Leader of the Opposition where he thinks we need to go in terms of banning corporate and union donations. I'd love to hear from the leader of the third party the substance of her ideas.

I look forward to that conversation this afternoon, where perhaps we will be able to talk about the direction we should go so we can build some consensus among ourselves. We can then begin that public discussion as a result of the introduction of legislation into which there has been input from all sides of the House.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is definitely time to take big money out of politics. It's time to get rid of corporate and union donations. But this Premier is actually choosing a partisan route that was begun by Mike Harris instead of our proud history of consensus. Can this Premier explain why she's tossing out decades of tradition and deciding that decisions should be made in the backrooms of the Premier's office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I am doing is I am responding to a moment in time where there are other jurisdictions that have moved in a particular direction and have made changes that I believe we need to make. We are updating a system that has grown out of date. I said a year ago, in June, that we needed to make changes. I am looking for input from all sides of the House. There has been a public discussion in the last number of weeks that has been precipitated by the media, and it's a welcome and important discussion.

So I look forward to hearing from the leaders of the opposition. I look forward to the public discussion that will ensue once we bring legislation to the House and it then goes to committee. Across the province, people can have input into how they think that legislation should change the rules under which we all operate.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. On Friday, the Environmental Review Tribunal granted a stay of construction for the White Pines wind turbine project in Prince Edward county, an unwilling host community. Under the terms of the contract, this project has to be finished its construction and attached to the grid by mid-June of this year. If it isn't, wpd has defaulted on the terms of their contract and the taxpayers can get out of it without a cost—that is, unless they get an extension, which only the Minister of Energy can give them.

My question is: Will the minister be granting an extension to wpd or will they have to be operational by June?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is before the Environmental Review Tribunal right now. They have not made a ruling yet. They have issued a statement that they will be consulting with both parties to look at the consequences. We operate the ERT on the weight of convenience, which means that they look at harm about outcomes in making their decisions. As there can be an appeal to me and to this government, it's very important that we, as the House, protect the integrity of that process and not pull it aside.

1100

I would suggest that we allow the RT process to proceed as an independent process, and at the right and appropriate point when appeals can happen from the RT—but I don't think we should be commenting on it in this House until that process is complete.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier: The people of Prince Edward county are watching this government's every move. The IESO can uphold the current terms of the contract, but if wpd wants an extension, they can only get it from the Minister of Energy. Wpd have also contributed $15,000 to the Ontario Liberal Party, most of it since the environmental review process began.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is simple: Will she require the IESO to enforce the current terms of the contract, which would put wpd in default if they aren't connected by mid-June? Or has wpd already bought themselves an extension?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This is the moment in which I've alerted all members that I will be listening carefully to this. I'm going to ask the member, if the theme is there, to be very cautious of how he impugns any motive. You will need to do some homework on that to ensure that it's not happening.

Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to recognize that there are people here in the gallery from the local Prince

Edward–Hastings business and tourism board. I want to recognize the efforts that they are taking to work through a democratic process.

But I also want to deal with the last point the member made—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're not endearing yourself by repeating what I asked not to be repeated.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to make one point here, Mr. Speaker. Through this process, our job—mine and the member for Hastings–Prince Edward county's—is to protect the integrity of this process. I'm very clear and have no difficulties doing that. I find it deeply, deeply offensive that someone would suggest, in a process in which politicians are not allowed to interfere—he is actually suggesting I interfere in that process—

Interjections.

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

You have one-sentence to wrap up, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: So shame on him, Mr. Speaker, because it sounds like the pot is calling the kettle black here.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier.

For 25 years, it was the practice to have consensus among Ontario's political parties before changing the rules about election campaigns. Bill Davis established a multi-partisan election finances committee in 1975 that included the Chief Electoral Officer and non-partisan members of the legal community to ensure that there was fairness. David Peterson changed the rules, but only after extensive discussions with the other leaders and the same elections commission. But when Mike Harris changed the rules, it came straight from the Premier's office.

Is this Premier going to be following in the footsteps of Bill Davis and David Peterson, or will she keep all of the decision-making power in the Premier's office, just like Mike Harris?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the only person who would be more agitated about me being compared to Mike Harris is Mike Harris, because, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we didn't see eye to eye on anything, including on this.

I think it's very important that there be a public process. I think it's very important that we look for the consensus along the political continuum. I think that moving to where other jurisdictions, including the federal government—it's a process that began under a Liberal government and continued under the Conservative government: that we move to that consensus position that other jurisdictions have taken.

I look forward to the conversation with the leaders of the opposition. I have said that we will be introducing legislation that has many of the components that other jurisdictions have already adopted, but I look forward to the conversation with the leaders of the opposition parties because there may be some issues in terms of transition and so on that they would like to share with me.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's important for the Premier to understand that Ontarians, and most of the people in this House, don't think that you're going to get this right on fundraising.

Ontario's New Democrats want to see a process that ensures that the new rules are developed through an independent and transparent and non-partisan process and, once passed into law, have the broad support of Ontarians required to ensure their legitimacy and their respect.

Will the Premier commit to taking this process out of her backrooms and make this a non-partisan and transparent process led by consensus among Ontario's political parties?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think what the third party is asking for is more process that will delay the decision. That is not what we are going to do. What we are going to do is put in place a process whereby there will be broad input from people across the province. There will be broad public discussion. We will extend the hearings and make sure that there is a longer period for that consultation.

In the interim, the input that I'm looking for from the leaders of the opposition parties—yes, I'm having a meeting today; I look forward to that. But as we draft the legislation, if there is input that they would like to give us, we look forward to that, and then we will be able to get on with that broad public discussion that I think is necessary.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, the young people in my riding of Davenport often find trouble navigating the barriers to getting involved in the process of finding a job. I often hear that they lack the direction and guidance they need to make informed decisions and find good jobs that will contribute to their growth as a professional. This is especially the case for young people who face multiple barriers to employment resulting from some combination of complex, challenging life circumstances.

Minister, I understand that you recently announced the launch of a new summer program aimed at helping young people overcome challenges and barriers to finding suitable, meaningful employment. Can you please inform the members of the House on how this new program will help our most vulnerable youth access the necessary training and employment services to find meaningful jobs?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Davenport for that very good question. Early last week, my ministry was pleased to launch a summer component of Ontario's Youth Job Connection program. Youth Job

Connection is a key component of our government's youth jobs strategy. I am proud to say that through this strategy, our government is investing an additional $250 million over two years to help roughly 27,000 of Ontario's students to find part-time and full-time jobs.

The Youth Job Connection summer program will provide part-time and after-school job opportunities to high school students aged 15 to 18 who face challenging life circumstances and may need support transitioning between school and work. This is one of the two new programs we announced last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you to the minister for the answer. Minister, when youth face barriers to opportunity based on background or circumstance, it is the responsibility of this government to make sure that they have access to the training they need to help them grow their skills and join the workforce. It is reassuring to the young people in my riding that the summer component of Youth Job Connection is now in place to help them gain access to the labour market.

I understand this program is part of our government's commitment to strengthening Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy, which will help support a comprehensive suite of new youth employment programs.

Many constituents in my riding of Davenport would be happy to know more about another program that launched last week to help young people with fewer barriers to access services that are available year-round. Minister, could you inform myself and the members of the House on Youth Job Link, another new program that is now in place to support young people across our province?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Helping youth of all abilities and backgrounds access the most effective employment and training is part of our government's economic plan to grow the economy and create jobs in this province.

With that goal in mind, last week Ontario also launched Youth Job Link, which is helping young people aged 15 to 29 plan their careers, prepare for the labour market and connect to job opportunities. The Youth Job Link program will be available year-round to youth and students at more than 320 locations across our province. It will offer information on career options, help with resumé writing and preparing for interviews, and assistance to match their skills with employers' needs.

With Youth Job Connection's summer component as well as the Youth Job Link program in place, Ontario has the right combination of programs in place to help youth with a broad spectrum of backgrounds, abilities and needs get the training they need to actively participate in our economy.

1110

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. The Sudbury by-election allowed the Liberal Party to raise $2.2 million. That's just shy of the $2.6 million they raised in the last general election. Some may ask: How could they do that? Well, they had prolific Liberal bagman Gerry Lougheed Jr. up there in Sudbury—a man notorious for making promises in exchange for favours, a man who is under investigation and facing corruption charges.

Mr. Speaker, how many promises did Gerry Lougheed Jr. make in exchange for donations to the Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting; I have a favourite Biblical quotation for the member, and it comes from the New Testament. It's John 8:7. I'll paraphrase: Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

If you and your leader were so interested in reforming fundraising in this province, you'll be wondering about that $5,000-a-person dinner at Barberian's and whether you're going to cancel it; or that $10,000-a-person dinner at the Albany Club with an exclusive 10 in the province; or that your leader's dinner donors are encouraged to pay $25,000 for a victory table—$10,000 more than the normal table—for an opportunity to host a caucus member.

Your party is living, sir, I say through the leader, in a glass house. I advise you not to throw stones.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections.

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

Start the clock.

Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not sure, Speaker, if that was an admission of guilt, with that dodge and deflection from the government. But I'm sure that the member opposite will agree with me: We know Gerry Lougheed Jr. can fundraise. He once raised $115,000 in a single night for Justin Trudeau at a swanky $1,300-a-plate dinner in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Easy.

Finish, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Gerry Lougheed Jr. is facing corruption charges. He allegedly promised a job to Andrew Olivier in exchange for stepping down. How do we know, Speaker, that he didn't make promises as part of those donations in the Liberal by-election in Sudbury?

The member opposite likes to make a number of quotes. I'll make a quote today: "The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour." That's why we, on this side of the House, are asking for an inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier have anything to hide, with the millions of dollars raised—

Interjections.

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

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think if the member would go through the list of donations, he would find out that none other than the Progressive Conservative Party has

received donations from Gerry Lougheed. So I ask the question: Did that have any influence on anything that is done by the Conservative Party?

Mr. Speaker, when I read about a fundraiser, such as the $10,000-a-person fundraiser at the Albany Club, I watch carefully the next day or at the next House sitting to see what questions are asked in the House, because one might draw the conclusion, when one sees who is at that dinner and then listens to the questions in the House or the stance taken by the opposition—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time.

Mr. Steve Clark: I just want an answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned—next comment.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. James J. Bradley: One always wonders, when there's a fundraiser and the questions come in the House and the stance is taken, whether people at that fundraiser had any influence on Conservative Party policy.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Hospitals in London are grappling with another year of deep cuts under this Liberal government. In the past two weeks, we've learned that St. Joseph's and London Health Sciences are both cutting the equivalent of 60 full-time positions. Budgets for supplies are being cut, and 12 crucial transitional care beds will be shut down this October.

People in my community want to know: Why is this Premier forcing hospitals in London to cut patient care, lay off front-line staff and shut down even more beds?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite, when she is in conversation with constituents, will remind the constituents that the budget actually puts $1 billion more into health care in this province, including $345 million for hospital funding.

In terms of the number of nurses in this province, in terms of the number of doctors, there have been thousands more nurses and doctors in this province in our term of government: 26,300 more nurses in this province as a result of our policies.

We will continue to support the health care system. We will continue to work with individual health care systems and hospitals around the province, including in London, and make sure that people get the health care that they need in a timely manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: When I'm speaking to constituents, they're reminding me about the health care policies that this Liberal government is causing to fail the services in health care.

Again to the Premier: Hospitals in London have revealed just how deeply this Liberal government is cutting health care. St. Joseph's has seen effectively a $36.5-million cut to its total budget over the past four years. London Health Sciences says that the year 2016-17 marks the fifth straight year that funding will not keep up with rising costs. And we all know who pays the price for these cuts. It's patients who wait longer for care they need; it's families who are forced to deal with more worry and more stress; and it's the front-line health care workers who don't deserve a pink slip from this government.

How can this Premier once again slash funding to hospitals in London and expect patient health care not to suffer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We recognized in this budget that there was a need to increase funding to hospitals. That's why there's a $345-million increase to hospitals in the province.

I had talked with CEOs of hospitals. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care had talked with hospital CEOs. We understood that there needed to be an increase. That's why there's $1 billion more in health care overall and $345 million for hospitals.

St. Joseph's Healthcare—that's the Hamilton St. Joseph's Healthcare—system received $395 million in 2015-16 in base funding, and that's a 48% increase since 2003. So over that period of time, a 48% increase, and that's just one hospital across the province. There have been increases, and $345 million in this year's budget.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. After each municipal election cycle, it's regular practice for the ministry to conduct a review of the rules governing municipal elections. Last week in the House, the minister introduced proposed changes via Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

We're all aware that our local communities are critical hubs of democratic activity and an important entry point into Ontario's governance system. That's why our municipalities and local leaders need to be supported by strong, clear and modern rules.

Mr. Speaker, these are important goals. Through you, can the minister explain how these goals are going to be reflected in this bill?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the honourable member for his question. I'll certainly do the best I can to answer it. He's correct: After each election we do a consultation. This time around, we had 3,400 submissions from councils, citizens and staff in municipalities. In turn, based on that, we looked closely at changes to campaign finance rules; regulating third-party advertising; challenges and barriers to making elections accessible; increasing, of course, transparency and accountability and allowing more local choice; the length of the campaign period; and whether municipal election rules are effectively enforced.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill should be fortunate enough to be passed, there will be improvements in all those areas, and I look forward to the bill moving through the House.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: As a former municipal councillor, I very much appreciate the changes that have been proposed to make our elections more effective and more transparent.

But in addition to those goals, the minister has put in place a new objective, and that is to give our municipalities the option to have ranked ballots in the 2018 municipal election. This is a new frontier in Ontario, and this goal has garnered a lot of attention throughout the province. Our municipal partners have been asking us whether we could move forward with these for 2018 for their communities.

Can the minister share what he and his team have been hearing and working on with respect to ranked ballots?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I can do that. The majority of feedback we received during our consultation, in fact, had to do with ranked ballots, which is why we proposed to make that an option for our municipal partners. The sense was, in the letters that we received, with voter turnout going down and seemingly less interest in municipal elections, that we needed a way to help engage more voters in the process and, also, one that would enhance the process itself by having it be more substantive in terms of debate and what have you.

We think we've done that in a number of ways, ranked ballots being one. Of course, it will be optional, and our hope is that it would get us away from some of the negative campaigning that so often happens in political arenas.

We look forward to continuing to work with communities. They deserve the best possible municipal leadership, and we think the changes in Bill 181 will help ensure that.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Premier. A year ago, the Minister of Health was asked by Christine Elliott to expand full stroke recovery services for those individuals between the ages of 20 through 64. She referenced the circumstances of a local Durham resident, Jim McEwen, who has championed changes to the legislation. Unless covered by private insurance, post-stroke survivors cannot receive the essential rehabilitation services that are needed for recovery. The minister responded at that time, "My ministry for some time has been working on the precise issue that she has raised." Mr. Speaker, one year—one year—after that statement was made in this House, nothing further has been forthcoming to help post-stroke survivors.

When will the Premier and her government start to satisfy not only the expectation of Ontario residents, but their actual commitments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member opposite for the question and his ongoing advocacy. I just want to say, as we all know, that Minister Hoskins is absolutely committed to putting patients first and making sure Ontarians get the health care they deserve.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we've increased base funding for Ontario's hospitals by $345 million, including a 1% increase to base funding. This is an investment that will keep not only hospitals open across our system, but also ensure that Ontarians get the care they deserve.

We are making investments across the health care sector. Let me just give you an example: On Friday, I was up in Cochrane only to announce the redevelopment of 69 new beds. These are the examples of the investments we continue to make in health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: Will the Premier now admit that she has been unable to implement this essential reform because of the inability of her government to adequately manage the health care system?

Is this not simply further evidence of the systemic problems inherent with a government mired in its own scandal, waste and mismanagement, or do post-stroke survivors have to attend $6,000 Liberal dinners to get their voices heard?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I just want to talk a little bit about some of the rehab services that we have been investing in. For example, with our changes, we have doubled the number of publicly funded physiotherapy clinics in Ontario. In total, 200,000 additional seniors will have improved access to high-quality physiotherapy. By the end of 2014, CCACs provided in-home services to an additional 35,000 clients. Mr. Speaker, we have set no limits on physiotherapy sessions, to ensure that Ontarians get the rehab services that they need.

I can assure this House that when the minister is back he will be able to speak at length about some of the investments we continue to make. I can assure this House that our minister and our Premier are committed to ensuring Ontarians get the services they need and deserve at the right time.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier.

Supervised access sites are a way for families going through often adversarial family matters where children are involved to have a neutral and, as the name suggests, supervised visit between a non-custodial parent and their children.

In Hamilton, supervised access has been provided professionally and compassionately for years by the downtown YWCA. But the Y has not received an increase in base funding for eight straight years and has now had to cut back on the hours, the days—the access—that struggling families desperately need. It is so bad that the Y has now been forced to remove five families from the wait-list that already stretches into years.

Does the Premier think it's okay that her government is preventing children from seeing their parents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member of the third party for her question.

Of course, it's always the intent, on the government side, to keep families intact wherever possible, to keep families with their children where possible, where they can be safe and secure and healthy. If that's not the case, we want to make sure that all of our partners in the sector who are mandated to look after children achieve that objective, whether it's a children's aid society or a partner agency.

I'd be very happy to talk to the leader of the third party about the specifics of this case, recognizing that I can't comment on individual children or their family situation. But our goal remains the same: We are resolute in ensuring that children receive their supports and the services they need to be protected and to reach their full potential.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect to the minister, that's exactly the opposite of what's happening here in Hamilton. Supervised access isn't even a choice for struggling families; it is a court-ordered process.

Supervised access centres place the focus on children. As one Hamilton mother described it to me, the supervised access site at the Y helps "keep families together in a healthy way," which "leads to well-adjusted children turning into well-adjusted adults."

What does the Premier and her minister say to this mother and to all families who are desperate for supervised access for the sake of their families but who can't get it because the government refuses to adequately fund it?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I am open to the advice of the third party. Obviously, we do respect and uphold court orders when it comes to the care and protection of children in our province. I'll be pleased to speak to her, as well as my colleague ministries who provide funding for local community groups.

At the end of the day, it is about what's best for our children; it's about what's best to help them reach their full potential.

Of course, we want to recognize and respect the court orders. Each situation often has its own circumstances.

As I said, I'd be happy to hear from the leader of the third party or my critic about the case in general, and then we can respond, perhaps, more specifically to her.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

The minister has recently announced a number of investments targeted towards driving economic development and creating jobs in indigenous communities.

Just last month, I had the opportunity to announce funding for two programs in my riding of Kingston and the Islands that provide support for aboriginal students: St. Lawrence College's project Kickstart College; and the Self-Identification Project at Queen's University, developed and run by Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre.

These investments reflect the government's commitment to work with indigenous partners and indigenous youth to create a better future for everyone in the province.

Can the minister please elaborate on the steps our government is taking to create economic opportunities for indigenous communities in Ontario?

1130

Hon. David Zimmer: The Ontario government wants to ensure that indigenous peoples have the opportunity to succeed and to fully participate in the economy. Our government is moving forward on many fronts by creating initiatives that are supporting business growth and providing economic development opportunities, jobs and skill sets for aboriginal peoples.

That's why we're doing the following four things: $322,000 for the Timmins Native Friendship Centre through the aboriginal community grants program; $175,000 to support a new welcome centre in Akwesasne; $200,000 for Miziwe Biik to develop employment and training opportunities for indigenous peoples here in Toronto; and $481,000 for a Kagita Mikam aboriginal employment and training centre to attract, hire, train and retain indigenous apprenticeships in skilled trades.

This is good for aboriginal economic development. It's good for Ontario's economic development.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's clear that our government is committed to working with indigenous partners to create good jobs and economic opportunities in indigenous communities, because we all recognize that creating economic opportunities for indigenous peoples strengthens Ontario's economy. When indigenous people prosper, all of Ontario prospers.

I understand that these recent announcements are part of larger initiatives to promote economic development opportunities for indigenous peoples. Through initiatives such as the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund and the Aboriginal Loan Guarantee Program, our government is creating stronger, more effective partnerships with indigenous communities.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister please tell us more about how the government is working to ensure that indigenous people have the opportunity to succeed and fully participate in the economy through the AEDF?

Hon. David Zimmer: Our government introduced the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund in the 2014 budget. It was to help aboriginal businesses, communities and organizations create, diversify and collaborate in their economic development. As a result, to date Ontario has funded 44 projects with indigenous partners through this fund.

Partnerships like these reflect the government's commitment to work with indigenous partners to create a better future for everyone in the province. That is why our government launched the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund: to create these initiatives that support

economic growth, and provide opportunities for jobs and skills for aboriginal people.

Supporting economic development for indigenous communities through this fund is just one of the many, many steps on Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last month, the minister met with me and a delegation from Renfrew county to go over the frequently-talked-about continued twinning of Highway 17. While the project will reach Scheel Drive this year, the next phase has yet to make it into the ministry's five-year plan.

The minister knows that this project is vital to the economy of Renfrew county as a transportation corridor. It connects Canadian Nuclear Laboratories and Garrison Petawawa to the nation's capital, and is a major artery for commercial truck traffic.

Given how crucially important this roadway is, will the minister commit to putting the further twinning of Highway 17 into his ministry's five-year plan?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, not only for his question but also for his advocacy on this issue. He was good enough to join the municipal representatives from his community who I had the pleasure of meeting with. We had a fantastic conversation.

Both the ministry and myself recognize the importance of this particular highway project and the impact that it will have as we continue to four-lane through the county of Renfrew. I can assure that member that I will continue to work closely with his community. The ministry understands the importance of this particular artery in eastern Ontario, and we'll continue to have conversations as we go forward.

The member should also know—I believe he does, Speaker—that the environmental assessment for the next phase is being completed, and the ministry will continue to work with his community on this project.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to the minister that we appreciate the work that has been done up until now, but we cannot stop.

The minister's predecessors asked the county government to make the case for the continued twinning of Highway 17, and I believe they have made that case over and over again in spades. It's now up to the minister.

He would also know that the federal government has made favourable overtures regarding infrastructure investments. Given that this is a Trans-Canada highway, I would ask that the minister take advantage of the federal infrastructure commitment and place the highest priority on this project. Four-laning will be a boon to Renfrew county both economically and socially, as well as making the route safer for everyone who travels it.

Speaker, I'll ask the minister again if he will commit to putting the next phase of twinning Highway 17 into his ministry's five-year capital infrastructure plan.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member opposite for his follow-up question. I also want to thank him for acknowledging that we now have a federal government in Ottawa that understands the importance of investing in crucial infrastructure.

I believe that member also knows that in this year, 2015-16, the Ontario Liberal government has committed more than $2.4 billion to expand and rehabilitate roads, bridges and highways right across the province of Ontario. Budget 2016 included a number of these crucial projects.

Not that many days ago, I joined with a number of my colleagues. We were down in the community of Puslinch, where we announced funding support in that community, in Wellington, for the Morriston bypass, which I know is of crucial economic importance to that part of our province.

Speaker, as I said in my initial answer, I'll continue to work with that member and with his community to make sure that, going forward, perhaps in partnership with the new Liberal government in Ottawa, we'll get this done.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you would have heard, like all Ontarians, the tragedy that is taking place in Attawapiskat as we speak.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that we've seen a rash of suicides on the James Bay. In fact, about five years ago, we had a similar situation going on. Myself, Payukotayno, and others from the James Bay, along with then-Grand Chief Stan Louttit, went to your government and asked for money for Payukotayno in order to put in place the staff necessary to deal with this on an ongoing, long-term basis—and your government did it; I'll give you some credit. But two years later, you took that money away.

We got over $1 million in order to hire staff to be able to do the work that helps prevent these types of things from happening. My question to you is, if you make a commitment to do something this time, will you take the money out once the media has gone away?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very worried and very concerned about what's happening in Attawapiskat and, quite frankly, in other remote northern communities as well.

The member opposite knows that I've been to Attawapiskat. I know that there are myriad concerns within the community, whether it's housing or whether it's counselling and support, as the member opposite has said.

We've assured Chief Bellegarde that our government is convinced of and committed to supporting First Nations communities in their times of need. In fact, Minister Hoskins will be travelling to Attawapiskat this week. But in the interim, as we speak, there is assistance

leaving from our government's resources to go to Attawapiskat right now.

We will do everything we can to put the supports in place. I know the member opposite knows that the concerns are multi-faceted. There's not just one thing that has to be done. There are a number of concerns, and we'll be working with the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I agree with you, Premier: It is a multi-faceted response that's needed to a very complex issue, and there's not enough time in question period to go through it.

But what I want to know, and I think what the people of James Bay and Attawapiskat want to know, is that there is a long-term commitment to what is a huge problem in our communities. When you have 11 people in one day, from age 11 to age 71, who try to take their life because of the situation in their community, I think people need to know that the response on the part of our provincial and federal governments—because we're the ones who do social services in those communities—whether it's child and youth services—we're the ones who run the hospitals that provide the services in those communities.

We need to have an assurance that whatever we do going forward from here is going to be an ongoing and long-term commitment, and we're not going to pull it away once the cameras have moved away from the story.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite, apart from the innuendo at the end that somehow this is about the lights and the cameras. That's not at all what this is about. This is about long-term, sustained support that we are working to put in place across the province, working with the federal government.

1140

The Minister of Children and Youth Services will also be going this week to make sure that the resources that we are sending and the resources that are in place are adequate. Where they need to be enhanced, we need to figure out how to do that, and we have to work in partnership with the First Nation and with the federal government.

I agree with the member opposite. I think he knows that. I think he knows that my concern—and it's not solely in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, although that is a new part of the context within which we're working. We will continue to work with the umbrella organizations, with NAN and with the AFN but, most specifically, with the communities, each of which has a particular set of concerns. My ministers will be going this week to make sure that we are sending the right resources that can be there to support in the short and the long term.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Prince Edward–Hastings has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change concerning the granting of an extension of wpd's wind turbine project in Prince Edward county. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

Also pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care concerning post-stroke services. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

VISITOR

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I just wanted to extend my warm welcome to Sprague Plato, who is the board chair of the Parkinson Society Ottawa. Sprague was in the House earlier, and I want to thank him for the amazing community service he delivers in our great city of Ottawa.

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

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have the great pleasure to introduce Ms. Olive Dodds and her daughter, Catherine Parley, and her friends and fellow volunteers at Michael Garron Hospital—Margaret Langmuir, Marianne Boivie and Eric Sigurdson—as well as MGH representatives Denny Petkovski and Justin Van Dette. They're here in the members' gallery today. I welcome you to Queen's Park.

Speaker, I also have the pleasure of introducing Kelly Doctor and Nadine Blum, who are here today to witness the reading of a petition they started on daycare wait-list fees. Welcome, Kelly and Nadine.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm rising today to highlight Parkinson's Awareness Month and the wonderful work that the Parkinson Society Canada accomplishes day in and day out.

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease occurring when the transmission of dopamine decreases. Signs and symptoms relating to the development of Parkinson's disease can include tremor, slowness and stiffness, impaired balance, rigidity of the muscles, fatigue, soft speech, problems with handwriting, stooped posture, constipation and sleep disturbances. Diagnosing Parkinson's can take time, and our family doctors are most likely to catch the signs and symptoms first.

As there is currently no cure for this disease, one can live with Parkinson's for years before realizing that

something is wrong. Those suffering from Parkinson's disease can benefit from certain medications and therapies designed to target areas of discomfort.

There are 55,000 Canadians aged 18 or older living with Parkinson's disease. The average age when signs and symptoms are first experienced occurs roughly around 64 years old. There's an increasing amount of Canadians—43%—who feel embarrassed by their condition. Close to two thirds of those suffering from Parkinson's also report out-of-pocket expenses associated with the disease. Spouses tend to be the primary caregiver in most cases, placing strain on family relationships.

Until a cure is found, I wish continued strength to those fighting this terrible disease and commend the Parkinson Society Canada, the health care professionals and family members who look after their loved ones with Parkinson's disease. I hope someday we can be here at the Legislature and report that a cure has been found for this terrible disease.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This month, the government announced that it will require all students from grades 1 to 8 to have at least 60 minutes of math instruction a day, starting in September. While progress in math is measured by standardized testing, progress in subjects like arts, science, geography and citizenship is much harder to quantify.

Students with exceptional learning and language needs, like those who attend specialized provincial and demonstration schools, must also be recognized and supported. These schools provide students with the opportunity to excel in subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic.

For months, families with children who attend these schools have pleaded with the government to recognize their importance and commit to keeping these schools open. Rather than commit to the long-term viability of these schools, the government capped enrolment, announced consultations and has now closed enrolment for next year.

Consultations have ended, and parents want to know: Will this government listen to families and education workers by keeping these schools open or will they turn their backs on our most vulnerable?

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: We have some very important guests from Comcast and NBC with us today: Rick Smotkin, Brian O'Leary and Randi Richmond. Because we have these special guests here, I thought I'd take a moment to discuss film and television production in Ontario.

Our government has combined superb talent and stateof-the-art infrastructure with competitive financial incentives that support Ontario's continued success as the number one film and television production centre in Canada and the third largest in North America. I'm pleased to say that the latest statistics for film and television production in Ontario reinforced this.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport announced that 2015 was the best year ever for film and television production in Ontario. Last year, film and television production supported by the province contributed $1.5 billion to the economy, the fifth consecutive year they've hit the billion-dollar mark. These statistics also show an increase of almost 4,500 jobs over the previous year, for a total of 32,500 full-time and spin-off jobs.

In Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the global HQ of William F. White and Cinespace studios also support these jobs and this success. This steady growth has led to a dynamic television and movie sector. Mr. Speaker, that's money going directly into Ontario's economy, money that is helping to build Ontario up.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This week marks National Volunteer Week, a week to celebrate and thank all of our local volunteers. In Perth–Wellington, we are lucky to have many outstanding volunteers whose contributions are invaluable.

Last week, I was pleased to recognize some of them at the United Way's Perth-Huron Spirit of Community Celebration. Thanks to generous community donations and the hard work of our volunteers, the United Way raised a record $1.2 million.

Earlier in March, I had the privilege of attending the volunteer service awards in Stratford along with my colleagues the MPPs from Huron–Bruce and Oxford. I presented scrolls to 147 hard-working volunteers.

Many organizations across Perth–Wellington are hosting special events this week to thank their volunteers. The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance has over 400 volunteers who provide more than 42,000 hours of service. They are hosting a volunteer lunch to thank them. The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington is planting a volunteer garden and hosting the Time to Give Breakfast, honouring employer-supported volunteerism. Many of our local municipalities are also presenting special awards of long-serving volunteers.

To all of our local volunteers in Perth–Wellington, I say thank you. Your time, service and dedication are very much appreciated. This week, I encourage everyone to celebrate our volunteers and consider volunteering for a local organization.

HYDRO REBATES

M^{me} France Gélinas: My constituent Mr. Pete Leduc came into our office when he got a notice from Hydro One encouraging him to apply for the Ontario Electricity

Support Program, which he did. Like most people in Nickel Belt, he had no idea that Hydro One was offering low-income customers a rebate. He found out when his March Hydro One bill came in the mail with a flyer about the program in the bill.

It takes six to eight weeks for the people to find out if they qualify; that means this program, which started on January 1, may not be helping my constituents until May or June. I think this isn't fair.

Mr. Leduc—and I agree—wants his rebate to be retroactive to January 1, and I think that's right. Not enough was done to make people aware of this program. We did a search of news stories related to this rebate; there weren't enough to fill a page and most were related to how complicated the program is and how little uptake there has been from consumers so far.

Low-income families in Nickel Belt are not scanning the Hydro One website to find discounts. They're just too busy trying to make ends meet. I have two questions for the government: Why was a flyer for a program that started in January in our March Hydro One bill and not before? And second, will the government do the right thing and backdate this rebate to January 1 for everyone that applies before the end of April?

COMMUNITY AWARDS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm delighted to rise today to speak about the many wonderful community leaders we have in Halton.

The Milton, Oakville and Burlington chambers of commerce recently held their community awards celebrations. I was fortunate to be able to attend the Milton event. It highlighted some of the passionate and hard-working people in our community. The evening showcased Milton's appreciation for our hard-working residents and business people who contribute so much to our community and economy.

This year, the chamber awarded several deserving people awards, recognizing their tireless efforts to build our community up. Some of these remarkable individuals are Brian Penman, Rebecca Hunter, and Denise and Peter Mule.

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In addition, several important businesses were also recognized, including Pasqualino, Dean DeFazio with snapd, iDrinkCoffee.com, C.F. Crozier and Associates and J. Currie Plumbing. In Burlington and Oakville, other members of the community and businesses included Geotab, Surround Integrated, El Spero Family Restaurant, the Oakville Hospital Foundation and many others.

I want to congratulate all of the award recipients and nominees. You are some of our region's finest, and we are grateful for your tireless efforts, dedication and vision. Thank you to all of our chambers for organizing these wonderful events.

VIMY FOUNDATION

Mr. Michael Harris: On April 2, I was pleased to attend an event in support of the Vimy Foundation, whose mission is to preserve Canada's First World War legacy.

Today, I stand with Canadians across our nation to commemorate the 99th anniversary of the victory at Vimy Ridge, where, for the first time in history, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together, attacking the French ridge and succeeding in capturing it from the German army.

In order to ensure Canada's heroic history is forever memorialized, the Vimy Foundation develops education programs to help youth and Canadians of all ages learn more about the sacrifices made by an entire generation, when Canada truly came of age—the moment where, many historians agree, our nation was born.

This time next year, Canada will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and the Vimy Foundation is working tirelessly to commemorate that battle. The Vimy Foundation believes that the key to a successful future lies in knowing one's past. To that end, next year, we look forward to their unveiling of a state-of-the-art visitor education centre and centennial park located near the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France.

It's always a privilege to recognize our troops, veterans and their families, and it's my honour to stand here today to recognize those who support them. Thank you to the Vimy Foundation, and I wish you nothing but success in your upcoming centennial celebration.

OLIVE DODDS

Mr. Arthur Potts: National Volunteer Week is upon us, and today I would like to take the opportunity to recognize a very special volunteer from my riding of Beaches–East York. Her name is Olive Dodds, and, as I mentioned in the introduction, she's in the east gallery with some family and friends. The theme of this year's Volunteer Week is "Volunteers are the roots of strong communities." I truly believe that Mrs. Dodds embodies this theme in her regular work at Michael Garron Hospital.

Olive began volunteering at Michael Garron in 1985, while it was still named Toronto East General Hospital. She started when she was 75 years old, and is believed to be Ontario's longest-serving hospital volunteer. Now, do the math, Speaker: Olive is well past her 100th year.

Over the past 30 years, Olive has contributed to growth in our community through her commitment and dedication to volunteering her time and expertise at MGH. Olive and her group of volunteers have knitted a countless numbers of dolls that are sold to raise funds for the hospital and have helped bring smiles to many of our hospital's smallest patients.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Olive Dodds and the thousands of other volunteers across our province for their commitment and their service to their communities. I would ask my fellow members to join me in congratulating this exceptional volunteer and all those like her who selflessly commit themselves to serving our

communities. She's a shining example for all of us to follow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did the math, and, yes, you are right: She is very young.

TERRY FOX EXHIBIT

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: This past Saturday, in my community of Waterloo region, the museum had a special opening of an extraordinary exhibit. "Terry Fox: Running to the Heart of Canada" opened in Kitchener. Several Cambridge residents were on hand to hear the opening, including my twelve-year-old son, Declan McGarry.

David Marskell from the museum introduced a special guest, Darrell Fox, Terry's brother, who spoke passionately and movingly about his experience of joining his brother partway through the run.

Darrell often talks about running as well, and he kind of jokes some days; he thought he ran more than Terry because he zigzagged through the crowd trying to obtain donations, but he hadn't done it day in and day out, as Terry had done. He was still in awe of his brother.

After talking about this, he actually answered questions, signed books and talked about his experiences taking photographs. He said that the Marathon of Hope changed his family's life forever.

Then we toured the exhibit. Words cannot express what it was like as we saw the jug of the Atlantic Ocean water that Terry had scooped up in Newfoundland and that he had intended to dump into the Pacific Ocean at the end. As we know, his journey ended tragically near Thunder Bay, Ontario. His prosthetic leg, his shoes, his shorts, his t-shirts and his sock full of holes were on display. His journals, his meticulous documentation of every mile he ran and how many he had left, were there on display.

Speaker, he ran a full marathon—42 kilometres—a day, every day. His mental toughness, his dedication to raise awareness and research dollars for the Canadian Cancer Society is an overwhelming and inspirational story. Why did he do it? Precisely to make sure that children who were suffering from cancer had the best care and research that they could possibly get.

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

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am very pleased to stand in the House today to recognize International Day of Pink—which actually isn't today; it's on Wednesday this week, on April 13.

As we all know, a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment is essential for students to succeed in the classroom and beyond. That is why this Wednesday, thousands of students and educators across Ontario, Canada and around the world will be recognizing International Day of Pink.

As most members of the Legislature are likely aware, International Day of Pink was started in 2007 by two high school students from Nova Scotia, David Shepherd and Travis Price. When they discovered that a classmate had been bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school, they decided to take action. They bought pink shirts and handed them out to some of their fellow students to wear to school. Before the end of the week, hundreds of students arrived at school wearing pink shirts, in an overwhelming sign of solidarity and support for their bullied classmate.

I'm providing my support to International Day of Pink and showing my solidarity today by making the statement that bullying is unacceptable, period. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social or electronic. It can be based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, race, age, appearance, disability or any other factor that may set someone apart from others. Any form of bullying, for any reason, is unacceptable in our schools. International Day of Pink acts as a worldwide annual event for people to speak out against bullying.

Our government fully embraces International Day of Pink and its message of bullying prevention and awareness. Our government is taking action on bullying in a number of ways. We developed anti-bullying legislation, specifically the Accepting Schools Act. This act, which passed in 2012, was the first legislation of its kind in Canada. This important piece of legislation is helping to make every school in Ontario a safe, inclusive and accepting place to learn.

Last year, our government took further steps towards ending bullying and promoting well-being, by releasing the revised and up-to-date health and physical education curriculum. This research-based curriculum helps our young people build skills for healthy relationships that will help prevent bullying, including cyberbullying, and harassment. In cases where this is happening, our curriculum will better prepare students to actively and safely respond, or get help in cases where it is needed.

Our health and phys-ed curriculum helps children and youth develop the skills they need for online safety by learning about safe and respectful use of technology and also to understand the social, emotional and legal implications of online behaviours such as sexting.

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Many schools and school communities are already demonstrating leadership in fostering and maintaining positive school climates. For the last five years, a number of school communities in Ontario have been recognized for their efforts through the Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools. These awards celebrate the innovative work that the safe and accepting school teams do in promoting a positive school environment and supporting student achievement and well-being.

Speaker, we're also working collaboratively to establish a Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, where

our school communities are given a platform to raise awareness of bullying-related issues with parents and their local communities. I should also note that our strong, ongoing partnership with Kids Help Phone gives young Ontarians access to telephone and Web-based professional counselling services 24 hours a day, every day.

Promoting well-being is also a key fundamental goal of achieving excellence—our renewed vision for education in Ontario. That vision will help to create learning environments that support the cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of our children and students. We know that bullying, harassment and discrimination have an immediate, negative impact on the well-being of our children and youth and their ability to succeed in school.

That is why the International Day of Pink is so important. This day is a reminder that everyone has a part to play in creating a positive school climate. So I encourage every member in the House to wear pink this Wednesday in recognition of the International Day of Pink and to continue to promote the success and well-being of all Ontario students.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of my leader, Patrick Brown, and the entire PC caucus to recognize this coming Wednesday, April 13, as International Day of Pink.

Last year, 9.4 million Canadians wore pink as part of International Day of Pink, and I hope that we will surpass that number this coming Wednesday. I'm proud that schools across Dufferin–Caledon in my riding will be participating in International Day of Pink.

Most of us know the story of how Day of Pink began, nine years ago, when two students in a Nova Scotia school stood up for a classmate who was being bullied simply because he chose to wear pink. These students organized a campaign to have their classmates wear pink in solidarity with their fellow schoolmate and against bullying. Now, every year, on the second Wednesday of April, individuals come together and wear pink to stand up against homophobia, transphobia and all other forms of bullying.

As we know, bullying, no matter in what form it is or who it targets, is wrong. Unfortunately, many are targeted and attacked because of who they are. Nearly half of parents in Canada report having a child being bullied, and one in three adolescent students in Canada report being bullied recently. Not only does bullying happen in schools, but it also occurs in workplaces, with 40% of Canadian workers experiencing bullying on a weekly basis. With the advent of social media—smartphones and tablets—these attacks, unfortunately, can happen anywhere at any time. Whether it is because of someone's ethnicity, skin colour, religion, weight, appearance, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, it's never okay.

We should be proud of what we have accomplished here in this Legislature, but there's still work to be done. I would like to specifically call out my former colleague Elizabeth Witmer for raising this issue many years ago as an MPP, and my colleague from Nepean–Carleton as well. Both have brought forward private members' bills to try to end bullying in our schools.

We must continue working on building a culture, not just in our schools but in the entire province, that celebrates diversity in all its forms and that includes Ontarians from every corner of the province, in every community and on every block.

We need to continue standing up for those who are attacked for who they are. That is what International Day of Pink is about: a time for all of us to put differences aside and come together to recognize that it's okay to be different, it's okay to be who you are, and that bullying in any form is unacceptable.

On Wednesday, April 13, I hope you will wear pink on International Day of Pink to show that it's never okay.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the New Democratic caucus and speak to the International Day of Pink this year. By standing up to bullying and discrimination today, we are working towards a more accepting Ontario tomorrow.

The support and popularity of the Day of Pink, which takes place on April 13 this year, speaks volumes to its success and the hard work of organizers, activists and communities across the province. I want to thank everyone who has organized an event this week for all of their efforts. Organizations like Jer's Vision, Egale, Queer Ontario and the Trans Lobby Group are leaders in the fight against homophobia, sexism, racism, transphobia and discrimination in all of its forms.

The fight against bullying and discrimination is no easy task and there is not just one target. Indeed, it is an effort to change what is accepted in society, rather than expecting someone to fit into socially constructed norms. We must challenge anything and everything that asks us to change who we are to appease others' expectations of us. This cannot be more true than when we are talking about Ontarians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer.

To this day, discriminatory practices remain in this province. While heterosexual couples don't have to ask to be recognized as parents, queer parents are expected to adopt their own children. Yes, Speaker, right now, if a lesbian couple uses a sperm donor whose identity they know, the partner of the woman giving birth isn't automatically considered a parent. Instead, after the child is born, a court date is obtained, independent legal advice is sought for the donor, and the non-birth mother chooses whether to adopt her own child or ask the court to declare that she is a parent.

The entire process for second-parent adoptions and declarations of parentage typically takes several months after a child's birth. In that time, families are not properly recognized under the law, which can impact health care decisions, the ability to travel internationally with the

child, as well as the family's sense of security. In the unthinkable and unfortunate event that the birth mother experiences complications in childbirth, there is no guarantee that the children's other mother will be legally recognized in a parental capacity.

I'm proud to say that New Democrats are at the forefront of the fight for equality of parental recognition in this province. My colleague from Parkdale–High Park, whose work in this area is a testament to her dedication as an activist and as a legislator, has tabled Bill 137, Cy and Ruby's Act (Parental Recognition), 2015. This legislation would eliminate the distinction between the person who gives birth and the child's other parent.

This legislation also makes sure that lesbian co-mothers who use donor sperm would be able to include both mothers' information on the child's birth registration form and allows for the recognition of an additional parent, such as a known sperm donor.

Finally, the legislation removes all gendered language from birth registration forms. Trans men who give birth will no longer be forced to identify as "mother," which is discriminatory and denies their lived reality.

While this legislation passed second reading, it has yet to be called to committee and enacted into legislation. The government's response to parental recognition must be more than lukewarm. Each day the government stalls in calling this important legislation to committee is another day of discrimination and uncertainty for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer parents. LGBTQ parents should not be forced to take this government to court for action on this issue. Equal access to parental recognition must be a priority.

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PETITIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

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

"Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

"Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

"Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

"Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

"Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman's damning report on failed billing; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

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

"To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One."

I fully support it, will sign my name and send it with page Jack.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have petitions from Fiona Cassels in Stittsville: "Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this, affix my name to it and send it with page Jerry.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here with hundreds of names that have been collected very quickly and initiated by Nadine Blum and Kelly Doctor, who are here in the east gallery.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

"Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis;

"Whereas there are currently no regulations in place to prevent daycares from charging parents and caregivers exploitative fees;

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

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

I completely support this petition, endorse it and send it down to the table with Deanna.

PROMPT PAYMENT

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas delayed payments are a harmful practice in Ontario's construction industry;

"Whereas Ontario's trade contractors incur significant costs when payments are delayed from general contractors;

"Whereas cash flow risks have forced many contractors out of business and discouraged others from investing in capital or hiring new workers;

"Whereas payment delays have led trade contractors to hiring fewer apprentices, which will lead to fewer qualified tradespeople in the future;

"Whereas prompt payment legislation offers government the opportunity to provide stimulus to the economy without spending a dime;

"We, the undersigned, call on the Ontario Legislature to support Ontario's construction industry by adopting prompt payment legislation as a means to address the payment delay issues in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and send it with Jerry.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: These petitions were given to me by Professor Janet McLaughlin in Waterloo. It's entitled "Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this ... government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

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

CAREGIVERS

AIDANTS NATURELS

Mr. John Fraser: I have a family caregivers petition, une pétition des aidants naturels.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

"Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

"Attendu qu'il y a plus de 2,6 millions d'aidants naturels qui soutiennent un membre de leur famille, un ami, ou un voisin en Ontario;

"Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

"Attendu que ces aidants naturels travaillent sans cesse afin de fournir des soins à ceux qui en ont le plus besoin, même si leurs efforts sont souvent ignorés;

"Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

"Attendu qu'un tiers des aidants naturels sont en difficulté, le double d'il y a quatre ans;

"Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

"Attendu que sans ces aidants naturels, le système de soins de santé et les patients de l'Ontario souffriraient énormément;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas's bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario;

"Donc, nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario d'appuyer le projet de loi de la députée Gélinas pour déclarer le premier mardi d'avril comme la Journée des aidants naturels afin de sensibiliser les Ontariens à leur importante contribution."

I'm affixing my signature.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a health care petition signed by hundreds of constituents from Parry Sound–Muskoka, and it reads:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I sign this and support this petition.

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GASOLINE PRICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Peter Sullivan from Chelmsford, in my riding, for sending those petitions in time. It goes as follows:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline"—gasoline is 94 cents in Sudbury and 74 cents 50 kilometres down the road—"and;

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

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

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

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

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here that's entitled "Supporting Transparency of Wait-Lists and the Banning of Non-Refundable Daycare Wait-List Fees in Ontario," and it is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

"Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis;

"Whereas there are currently no regulations in place to prevent daycares from charging parents and caregivers exploitative fees;

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

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Harry.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sorry to hear of your current dilemma that you're facing at home.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) is a mandatory pension plan which would target small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas there has been little to no discussion on what the costs would be, or who would pay them; and

"Whereas affected businesses would be hit with up to $1,643 per employee, per year in new payroll taxes starting in 2017; and

"Whereas affected employees would have up to $1,643 per year extra deducted from their paycheques, and it would take 40 years for them to see the full pension benefits; and

"Whereas the Canadian Federation of Independent Business predicts the unemployment rate in Ontario would rise by 0.5%, and there would be a reduction in wages over the longer term; and

"Whereas all of these costs would be shouldered exclusively by small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas public sector and big business employees who already have a pension plan will not be asked to pay into the plan;

"We, the undersigned, do not support implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and petition the government of Ontario to axe the pension tax."

I fully support it, will affix my name and send it with my page buddy Jack again.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to thank Cindy Thompson from the city of Ottawa for doing all the hard work in putting these petitions together.

It reads as follows:

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to remortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more. I'm going to put my name on it and give it to page Chandise to bring to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Government order G181.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, my parliamentary assistant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to remind the minister that he needs to move second reading of the bill to initiate the debate.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, forgive me. I'm new at this. I've only been here 15 years, right?

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to make that exciting announcement again that I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, who will enlighten us shortly. Before I turn the floor over to him—my parliamentary assistant—I'm pleased to discuss the proposed Municipal Elections Modernization Act, known affectionately as Bill 181.

It was just last week that I was joined by my parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland–Quinte West, and the Deputy Premier and the Asso-

ciate Minister of Finance to announce the important changes we are proposing to municipal elections in Ontario. Our proposals, if passed, would help ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect the real and evolving needs of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities really are the governments closest to the people, as you know. We saw that last week up in Morriston. They provide front-line services like public transportation and recreation facilities. They deal with local issues like fixing roads and collecting property taxes. Our communities need to be strong and vibrant places where people can live, work and raise families. Good municipal government is what turns cities and towns into communities, and streets into neighbourhoods. For this reason, we want to help make sure the rules governing municipal elections are clear and simple and that they capture how modern campaigns and elections should be run.

At a time when voter turnout in many communities is going down, it's time to look at ideas that might help us reverse this trend. Many seem to agree with me. The reforms we're presenting also reflect the significant input we received from municipalities, community groups and the public at large.

Over the past year, we've had a number of conversations with Ontarians about municipal elections. As you know, the Municipal Elections Act is reviewed immediately following each municipal election to see if we can make some improvements. During the review, we asked how we could make local elections work better while keeping them fair, and Ontarians responded. I'm pleased to inform the House that we received more than 3,400 submissions. We heard many perspectives, including on the subject of ranked ballot voting.

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Mr. Speaker, if this bill passes, Ontario will become the only jurisdiction in Canada to currently provide municipalities and voters with an alternative to the first-past-the-post voting system.

I'm pleased that we are joined here today by Dave Meslin from Unlock Democracy, and Katherine Skene and the good people from the Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto, who have all been powerful advocates for this type of reform.

Proponents of ranked ballots believe this method of voting can make election campaigns more civil. I agree with this outlook. Jurisdictions that are using ranked ballots around the world have noticed better engagement, better and more civil debate, and higher voter turnouts. Those are three things I think we'd aspire to here in Ontario.

I believe candidates would have a vested interest in working better together, possibly reducing negative campaigning. I think we could all agree that's very much what our communities deserve: elected officials who are committed to working together to serve their communities better and debating issues of substance that are important, rather than engaging in personal attacks.

It will be up to municipalities to decide whether to embrace ranked ballots. I know several municipalities that we have met with have advocated for them.

The member from Northumberland–Quinte West will speak further about what we heard on ranked ballots shortly.

Speaker, we are also proposing changes around campaign financing and third-party engagement with additional accountability measures, because we also heard about the need to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are transparent, accountable and flexible enough to ensure local choice.

We hope to increase transparency in municipal elections, so we are proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising in order to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and transparent support. This would include setting contribution and spending limits. Only contributors who are eligible under the act could register as a third party. Third parties would also have to identify themselves on signs and advertisements. Candidates would not be able to direct a third-party advertiser on where they should focus their efforts or what their advertisements should say.

We are also proposing changes to the campaign finance rules that ensure the rules are not only transparent but consistent with accountable, fair and modern election finance practices. Corporations and unions could not register to be third-party advertisers or make contributions to third-party advertisers in municipalities where there is a bylaw banning these contributions. It's important.

Furthermore, I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include the option to ban corporate and union donations. Where have I heard that before? It's important that our cities and towns undertake this important conversation with their citizens. I applaud groups that have fostered that conversation—groups like Campaign Fairness, who have also joined us today. I was pleased to speak at their reception here at Queen's Park last Wednesday, and I was pleased to hear their perspective on the importance of this legislation. Here, in part, is what they said to us:

"The Liberal government gave us the Greenbelt Act and Places to Grow legislation and the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, but politicians and developers found ways to get around that legislation.

"Now you've proposed Bill 181....

"Your timing could not be more perfect....

"[While] nobody can be certain that the MEA modernization act will suddenly change the political landscape or protect southern Ontario's physical landscape ... it goes a long way to ensuring that combattants fight on a level playing field and restores respect for the political system. Nobody can ask for more than that. Today you've done something truly important ... and we thank you." I thank you for those comments.

Our proposed changes would help voters, candidates and contributors alike to better understand the election rules. In fact, the changes aim to encourage greater

compliance with these rules. For instance, one proposed change is to refund nomination fees to candidates only if they file their financial statement by the deadline. In this way, candidates would be encouraged to file on time.

We also heard during the consultation that Ontario's municipal elections are just too darned long. Ontario currently has the longest nomination period of any province in Canada. This contributes to campaign fatigue among candidates and voters—January 1 to whenever, with the 800 community meetings in Toronto that Mayor Tory told me about.

Based on what we heard, we are proposing to shorten the municipal election campaign period by 120 days. Candidates would be able to register between May 1 and the fourth Friday in July, instead of January 1 to the second Friday in September, in the year of the municipal election. Shortening the length of the nomination period would give municipalities more time to prepare ahead of the election, should they choose to use ranked ballots.

We also want to help make elections more accessible for everybody. Our proposed changes would require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities. Municipalities would need to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day, so they would be informed.

Lastly, we are proposing improvements to the voters list. We will continue to work to make it easier for voters to add their name to the list or make changes to their information, as well as to make it easier for clerks to remove the names of deceased electors—who, from time to time, show up to vote—from the list. In addition to these shorter-term solutions, we will be working with stakeholders and a stakeholder working group to identify systematic issues with the voters list. We will, of course, continue to develop ways to help ensure a more accurate voters list over the long term.

Today I am proposing a package of reforms that respond to the changing needs of our communities. By increasing the transparency of municipal elections and promoting local choice, the proposed reforms represent a big step forward for local democracy, and they reflect what Ontarians say they want to see.

I want to thank everyone who spoke to us about how to make municipal elections more modern and how to make Ontario municipal elections better. Thank you to the good people of the Ranked Ballot Initiative, Unlock Democracy, and Campaign Fairness for their outlook and for their support.

I'll just close with a story my mother used to share with me when I was growing up. I didn't understand it until I was in my mid-twenties. She said, "Teddy, anybody can slay a dragon, but it's the people who get up every single day and try to love the world all over again who are the real heroes." These folk are my real heroes. Thank you for what you've done.

Speaker, needless to say, I urge all members to vote for the passing of this bill. With that, things get far more exciting as I turn things over to my parliamentary assistant for some wise words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, let me welcome the folks in the members' gallery: the Unlock Democracy folks, and the Ranked Ballot Initiative and Campaign Fairness people. This is truly democracy at work, and we thank them, as the minister did, for all their input. We're not quite done yet, but I'm sure we will get there.

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I want to thank Minister McMeekin for giving me the opportunity to speak today. This is very important, especially having spent some 12 years in the municipal sector before coming to this place back in 2003. It gives me some insight on some of the challenges.

Over the past year, I have had the pleasure of working alongside Minister McMeekin on the review of the Municipal Elections Act. In fact, I joined him in launching the review at the Centre for Social Innovation right here in Toronto just a few months back.

In my years of working at Queen's Park and back home in the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West, I've come to understand first-hand the need to have a voice in local issues and in the local democratic process. As you heard from the minister, we heard from many people and groups since last summer on how we can strengthen and support our communities by working to improve how our municipal elections are run.

As part of my responsibilities as parliamentary assistant, the Premier gave me the mandate to strengthen municipal governance through the Municipal Elections Act review. I was tasked with helping to ensure that the act continues to meet the needs of communities, including providing municipalities with the option of using ranked ballots as an alternative to first-past-the-post. As Minister McMeekin mentioned, there is a lot of interest in the ranked ballot. Frankly, it even surprised me. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this type of ballot will allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference. No Canadian municipality currently uses the ranked ballot, but many jurisdictions around the world do, including Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Supporters of ranked ballots say that they have the potential to give voters a greater say in who is elected, can increase voter turnout and may result in elected officials who better reflect the diversity of their communities. Most of the public input that we received favoured allowing municipalities the option of using ranked ballots for future municipal elections.

During a review of the act, we heard feedback on several matters related to ranked ballots, such as the need to consult the public before a municipality decides to implement ranked ballots, how voters in a ranked ballot election will be counted, which offices would be elected using the ranked ballots and whether it should apply to all members of council and, of course, establishing a deadline for new rules to be in place so that municipalities have enough time to prepare for the upcoming 2018

municipal elections. Although that sounds far away, it really isn't.

The legislation we are proposing today will provide the authority to address these matters. In giving municipalities the option to use ranked ballots, we are allowing for more choices at the local level as to how municipal leaders are elected. Because every community is unique, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't always work. The option to use ranked ballots, along with other proposed changes that Minister McMeekin indicated earlier on, will enable us to take a big step forward in making our municipal elections more modern and transparent.

I join Minister McMeekin in support of Bill 181, and I urge all members to vote on passing this bill. It's long overdue, and I look for everyone's support.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to rise to offer my comments on Bill 181.

Speaker, I've been in this place for just over four years, and in talking to my municipalities, talking to the ordinary people in my municipalities, I haven't really heard a lot of them asking for this type of thing on ranked balloting. It comes up every once in a while; usually around municipal election time is when it comes up. But it really isn't high on their list. I think if the government would pay more attention to things that really matter, at least to the citizens of my riding, certainly about their health care cuts and issues like this—that is something that they should be working a lot harder on than this bill.

I think there are a whole bunch of things in this bill that the government is trying to accomplish. I wonder if there are just too many things that they're trying to do all at once without concentrating on something that may be in this bill that's really important to the municipalities.

I think that if the government was really listening to my constituents in the riding of Perth–Wellington, they would be talking about cuts to seniors' health care, for instance. The drug plan is one that has certainly gotten constituents in my riding all worked up. Like I said, this type of thing doesn't really come up—usually just around municipal election time—and it's only a few people who talk about ranked balloting.

I think the importance of doing this isn't as important as this government thinks. It's probably a deflection, trying to deflect some of the criticism they've been receiving in the last number of weeks since the budget was produced and since health care has been cut across this province.

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

M^me^ France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to both the minister and his parliamentary assistant when they focused mainly on the part of the bill that has to do with ranked ballot elections. I must tell you, Speaker, that I've been a politician for eight and a half years and I had never heard of this issue. I did not even know what it meant. I work in Toronto now, and I attended an event where some people were very passionate about why this needed to be brought forward. But to say that this is an issue that we hear a lot—I have never heard about it. Now I do.

But the bill does not only talk about ranked ballots. The bill is quite encompassing. This is a 59-page bill, and it goes through:

—a change to the election calendar: It used to be that you had to put your name on between January 1 and September; now, it will be May 1 and July;

—eligibility for who can run for office: You will have to have 25 people who support you if you want to put your name forward;

—eligibility of who can vote: This is an issue that I hear lots in my riding as to who is considered a tenant and who is not;

—ranked ballot election, which is what the government chose to focus on;

—advertising by candidates during an election campaign; and

—advertising by third parties during an election campaign.

It goes on to talk about campaign contributions to candidates, contributions to registered third parties, campaign expenses of candidates and of third parties, financial statements of candidates and registered third parties, administration of elections, and the list goes on.

There may be some good ideas in there. It will require a bit of time to go through.

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

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to talk about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, making these changes is really long overdue. After every municipal election, we do some consultations. We try to find out what is working and what is not. It's important for governments to review the process.

After taking a review and holding consultations across the province, over 3,400 submissions were filed. These were submissions from everyone, whether they were municipalities, individuals or groups. People wanted to have their voices heard when it came to the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Here's what they told us: They told us that they wanted to see some changes when it came to ranked ballots, when it came to campaign financing, when it came to the campaign period, when it came to accessibility and when it came to the voters list.

Why? Because, yes, Ontario is changing. We are growing, and our electorate and the residents in this province and their needs are also changing.

1410

As a result of this and in answer to some of these requests, we have come up with some suggestions with this bill, Bill 181; for example, ranked ballots. At a time when voter turnout is going down in many communities, it's time to look at ideas that can reverse the trend. We're proposing providing municipalities with the option to

introduce ranked ballot voting in their communities if they choose so.

Also, campaign finances: To increase transparency in municipal elections—as we know, we are hearing a lot about this when it comes to elections right now—we're proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising and to increase accountability for advertisers. This is something that we often hear people in the public discuss. I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include a discussion about whether to ban corporate and union donations.

In addition, campaign periods: The largest nomination period of any province can lead to voter fatigue and also candidate fatigue. I think this is an important exercise and an important bill.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a moment to give some comments on the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West's speeches on Bill 181, which is dealing with changes to the Municipal Act, particularly giving municipalities the option of having ranked ballots. I have no problem with that idea. Certainly, it's the way most MPPs get elected at nomination meetings. It's often a system used for electing leaders as well, where the person running has to get at least 50% of the vote. Typically, you would number the ballot and, for the person who gets the fewest votes, their second choices are reassigned.

It's a system that has been used in Australia for the municipal, lower House and upper House since 1918, I believe. I personally don't have a problem with that. I agree with the minister that it probably would mean that candidates would have to work together so they don't upset the voters who might support another candidate who would be assigning another choice to them.

The part of the bill that I think really needs to be dealt with on a provincial basis is the third-party advertising section because, here in Ontario, it's the Wild West for third-party advertising, particularly in provincial elections. We have groups like the Working Families Coalition spending as much as political parties have spent; they spend millions and millions of dollars. Their main goal is to defeat Progressive Conservative candidates, and they've been fairly effective at it, I'd say, in the last three years. Frankly, it's just not fair and it's not a level playing field.

That's an issue that this government needs to deal with. They're talking about it for municipal elections in this bill, but it's something that absolutely needs to be addressed for provincial elections.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continued debate. I was glad to have a couple of minutes to add comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments. One of the government members can reply. It has to be either the minister or the parliamentary assistant.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The final two minutes?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, to respond.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to respond.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Perth–Wellington, the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Halton and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Let me start with Parry Sound–Muskoka. I think there are some things that need to change provincially, but I'm the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Those changes will have to be facilitated by the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

To the member for Perth–Wellington, who suggested that it's just too much, too fast: I guess if I'm going to be criticized for anything, I'd love to be criticized for trying to do too much. We're often accused of doing too little around here, so too much is good. Local governments: He questioned whether this is an issue. Local governments really need to listen, I would argue, to those who spoke up during the consultation, the 3,400 persons who very passionately embraced the ranked ballot concept.

The member from Nickel Belt knows that every party uses the ranked ballot in leadership races. She also talked about how lengthy the bill was: 60 pages. That makes sense because the member from Perth–Wellington said that we were trying to do too much. If you're going to do too much, you have to be comprehensive about it, so we did that.

We listened to voices. The voices spoke pretty clearly, and the bill before us is a reflection of that. The House, in its infinite wisdom or folly, will have to choose which way it wants to go.

But I would just end with this: It's clear that some people who are cynical and hold nothing sacred need something to believe in. Our job is to try to enhance that believability as best we can. I think Bill 181 is an honest effort to do that and reflects what we heard from the body politic out in Ontario.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I want to start by thanking all the people, organizations and municipalities that shared their thoughts on the Municipal Elections Act review with me and my office. We appreciated everyone who took the time to talk with us and send emails and share copies of their submissions. I also want to thank the ministry for providing the briefing last week.

Municipalities are a responsible level of government. They need a Municipal Elections Act that allows them to hold modern elections in a way that suits their circumstances. We look forward to continuing to work with them as we move forward, to ensure that municipalities, officials and candidates have what they need to run modern, accessible, democratic and effective municipal elections.

I want to acknowledge that there are some positive things in this bill, but there is one single issue that will determine our vote: We cannot support a bill that takes democracy away by allowing a government to change the way they are elected without the requirement to consult the people.

I know there are a number of people here today because of their belief in the democratic system. Many of them are here because they believe that the ranked ballot system is more democratic. I'm pleased to see they are here, because I want to ask them for their support to make this bill even more democratic. I want to ask their support to ensure that the people have a say in the change of their electoral system.

The election doesn't belong to this government or even the members of the municipal council. It belongs to the people who vote in it, the people who come out every four years to choose the person who represents their values and supports their issues. These people need to have their voice heard if there is to be a change in the system by which their municipal government is elected.

There is a greater responsibility when it comes to changing the electoral system, one that requires that we consult the people not just in a few meetings but in a systematic and measurable way, one which requires that we take the time and make the effort to ensure that if there is change, it is one that is endorsed by the people. As the city of Owen Sound said in their submission, "Municipal elections are the democratic cornerstone of local government."

Already the provincial government had decided that the two choices municipal councils and the people who vote for them will have are first-past-the-post or ranked ballots. The government may have done some consultation on how to implement ranked ballots, but they didn't do any consultation on whether it was the best way or whether there's another system that would be even more democratic.

When this government was first elected, they created a citizens' assembly to examine all the possible electoral options, but the decision that ranked ballots was the best of the options for municipalities seems to have been made behind closed doors, with no transparency. Now this government wants to allow the electoral system to be changed in municipalities with no consultation at all.

People deserve a referendum before voting on system change. That is true of every level of government. This government used to recognize that. In 2007, when they looked at changing our electoral system, they held a referendum. When they announced the referendum question, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said: "Our democracy belongs to its citizens, and it is the voters of this province that should decide how their representatives should be elected."

In fact, the Premier was quoted in the Toronto Star in 2014 as saying, "Remember, we're the party that brought forward the idea of changing the electoral system in Ontario. We had citizens' assemblies. We had a referendum on that issue."

But in this bill, there's no requirement for municipalities to hold a referendum or even to do any public consultation before changing the voting system. When the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was criticized for this on Twitter, his response was, "Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it."

Democracy needs more protection than "So be it." That is why we will be putting forward an amendment to require a municipal referendum before a municipality changes their electoral system. This referendum could be a separate vote, or it could be done on the ballot as part of a municipal election. If the people of a municipality want ranked ballots, that will give them the opportunity to voice that.

1420

It may be that changing to a new electoral system would be more democratic, but we can't allow democracy to be ignored in an effort to change the system. Mr. Speaker, elections are about democracy and ensuring that all people have a say in the government that represents them. Changing the entire electoral system based on the views of only a small portion of that population not only shows disrespect for our democratic system; it is irresponsible.

As Aaron Wudrick of the National Post said in a recent article, "Historical precedent weighs heavily in favour of a referendum, as no government in modern Canadian history has attempted to implement it without one—and electoral reform referenda in Prince Edward Island (2005), British Columbia (2005 and 2009) and Ontario (2007) were all defeated. But not all electoral reform referenda pan out this way. In New Zealand, for example, a 1992 referendum on electoral reform not only won, but won big, with the pro-reform side winning 84% of the vote. Accordingly, reform advocates should not view a referendum as a death sentence for their cause, but as an opportunity to win new converts to the pro-reform side."

The Toronto Star agreed. In a January editorial, they said, "Referendums on voting change have already been held in three provinces, setting a precedent of sorts. All failed, and some reformers are so hell-bent on dumping first-past-the-post that they are urging the Liberals to be 'brave' and move ahead on their own hook. That makes no sense. The lesson of past referendums cannot be that the people are too blind or foolish to see the light; it must be that those who want change have to do a better job of persuasion."

If ranked ballots is the most democratic electoral system, the people will choose it, but it has to be their choice, not the government's choice.

For those at home who are not familiar with the ranked ballot system, perhaps we should explain how it works. Instead of just voting for a single candidate, a voter will rank the candidates in order of preference. The votes will be counted and the candidate with the least votes drops off. All ballots that had that candidate as their first choice are then distributed to the candidate that the

voters had ranked as their second choice. If no candidate has received over 50% of the vote, the lowest candidate once again drops off and their votes are redistributed to the next choice ranked on the ballot.

There are a lot of questions that aren't known about how ranked ballot elections would be implemented in Ontario. How many candidates could a voter rank? Are they required to rank all of them? This was the subject of a court challenge to the ranked ballot voting system in San Francisco, but the government is asking us to vote on this bill without knowing which model will be used here or whether it will be up to municipalities to decide.

There are many other questions. Do candidates have to receive certain percentages, say, beyond the first round? If so, how will it be tabulated?

After the repeal of ranked ballot voting in Aspen, Colorado, a report from the Colorado Secretary of State, elections division, stated: "Written comments demonstrated that depending on selection of any specific instant ranked voting tabulation algorithm, the same set of ballots could have resulted in multiple differing answers."

There are also questions about what the ballot will look like and how voters will be educated on how the system works. We don't even know whether these decisions will be made by municipalities or by the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, this bill doesn't answer any of these questions. What it says is:

"(2) The regulation may provide that a ranked ballot election is authorized for only specified offices on a municipal council."

The bill goes on to say that regulations may be created on:

"1. Ballots, voting procedures, the counting of votes and recounts.

"2. Powers that the clerk of the municipality may exercise in administering ranked ballot elections.

"3. Information to be made available to the public with respect to the counting of votes in each round."

That means that the province has the ability to make all of the decisions regarding the electoral system behind closed doors, with no public scrutiny and no transparency.

You will notice in that list I just read, Mr. Speaker, that there's nothing definitive in there about how it's going to work, just what needs to be done.

The government has said that they are hoping to have the regulations ready by spring. In fact, during our briefing on this bill, they said, "The intent is to have all the regulations in place as soon as possible after the bill is passed," so I'm going to ask them to release them before this bill goes to committee. Let's have the discussion about the ballots, voting procedures, the counting of votes and recounts. Let's ensure that municipalities who have experience with municipal elections can comment on these regulations when they come to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, there's another issue in this bill that I'm hoping to hear comments on at committee, and that is the changes to the recounts. Currently, the Municipal Elections Act states that a recount must be done in the same manner as the original count. The only exception to this is section 60, subsection (3), which states, "If the judge who orders a recount under section 58 is of the opinion that the manner in which the original count was conducted caused or contributed to the doubtful result, he or she may, in the order, provide that the recount shall be held in a different manner and specify the manner."

Under Bill 181, this subsection would not apply to ranked ballot elections. That means that if there's a problem with the way the original count was done, there's no ability to change that method of the recount. Perhaps this was done because ranked ballots can be more complicated and take longer to count, so counting done by hand in larger municipalities such as Toronto would be a challenge. I understand that reasoning, Mr. Speaker. However, I'm very concerned that this bill, as written, provides no avenue to recount if there's a technical problem.

We could have a situation where there's a glitch with the machine and you have fed in a thousand votes and only 10 register, and you would still have to do the recount using the machines. We need to look at a way to deal with that type of situation. We cannot sacrifice someone's democratic right to vote because it's easier, whether it is counting votes or determining the electoral system.

As our leader, the MPP from Simcoe North, said last week, "No government should rush through electoral reform without first putting it to the citizens to decide. The government of the day doesn't get to change the electoral system, given that they, themselves, are an interested party. I believe if you're going to change how we have elections ... a referendum is necessary."

Mr. Speaker, changing the method by which people are elected will change the results in some cases, so you cannot have the people who will be benefiting from the change making the decisions without consulting the people. It isn't democratic and it puts municipal councils in a situation where they are forced into a clear conflict of interest. Putting them in that situation isn't showing respect for democracy, municipalities or the voters.

As you know, a conflict of interest occurs when a politician is making a decision that could result in a benefit to them. It's a serious charge. In this case, making the decision to change to the ranked ballot could mean ensuring a municipal politician's re-election, which also means ensuring their salary. I don't believe that municipalities want the appearance and I don't think it's fair for the province to put them in that position. When the provincial government considered electoral reform, they held a referendum, as did other provinces. Municipalities are no less a responsible level of government.

The government would tell us that this is a change that municipalities want and the people of Toronto requested. In their submissions, Vaughan and Richmond Hill councils asked that public consultations be required before a ranked ballot could be implemented. The Toronto city council motion was even stronger. In October

2015, the city of Toronto council passed a motion which recommended "that the province should not proceed with amendments to the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked-choice voting."

The motion went on to say "that if the province does amend the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked-choice voting;

"(a) the use of ranked-choice voting be optional for the city of Toronto; and

"(b) the city of Toronto only be permitted to implement ranked-choice voting after holding public consultations and a referendum...."

Let's make sure everybody is very clear on what Toronto's current city council said: They didn't want the option of ranked ballots, but if the province proceeds with the changes anyway, there should be a requirement for a municipal referendum.

In the 2007 provincial referendum this government had set the support needed at 60% of the votes cast. They reported that it was the same level as the level used in referendums in Prince Edward Island and British Columbia. If we use the same threshold, then according to a recent poll by Mainstreet Research, there isn't enough support for ranked ballots in Toronto to meet the threshold to win a referendum.

1430

Mr. Speaker, there are some people who have been very vocal about the fact that they believe municipal elections should use ranked ballots, but there are millions who haven't spoken at all. There are 2.79 million people in the city of Toronto, and we've only heard from a small fraction of those people. On electoral reform, everyone should have the opportunity for input. There are a lot of people who don't make it out to city hall or legislative committees to express their views, people who may not email their councillor or their MPP, but they show up every election to cast their ballot because it is their democratic right and they want a say in the future of their communities. We need to hear from those people.

There are a lot of people who came to this country because they valued our democracy. They studied to take the citizenship test so they could participate in Canada's democracy. They are working hard to build a life here for their families. They value being able to come out and vote in a free election. Those people deserve a say before we change the electoral system.

As a recent editorial in the Caledon Citizen said, "If we're going to have electoral reform that we can all live with and embrace, there's going to have to be a faction that comes up with a workable idea and get it before the voters, through a referendum, complete with explanations as to how it would work, and promotion of the advantages. Opponents would be able to make their own case to the contrary.

"It could be argued that electoral reform is too important to leave up to government."

The city of Toronto isn't the only municipality that passed resolutions saying that they do not want ranked ballots. Last July, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing set out a document entitled "Ranked Ballots Would Give More Choice to Municipalities." In response, a number of municipalities passed motions against ranked ballots, such as the one which stated, "The county of Grey does not support the proposed changes to the municipal electoral system which would provide the option of using ranked ballots during municipal elections."

The town of Minto passed a resolution around the same time which read, "That the province be advised" that the "town of Minto not support a ranked ballot system for municipal elections in Ontario for the following reasons:

"(1) Issues of splitting the vote, negative campaigning or abandoning a race are generally not problems in rural Ontario;

"(2) 'One candidate one vote' councils elected in Ontario have built communities that are the envy of the world, with open, transparent and fair races with very few issues;

"(3) Ranked ballots will be confusing and will increase cost for training candidates, election officials and voters as well as require expense and unnecessary equipment;

"(4) Ranked ballots may encourage political parties to run slates of candidates to attempt to win as many first-, second- and third-place votes so that a party secures the office over an individual."

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing consultation with municipal clerks and CAOs held in North Bay recommended that municipalities below a certain size not have the option to use ranked ballots. A number of other people have raised concerns about ranked ballots. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson—and, Mr. Speaker, you will know who that is—a former Liberal cabinet minister, said it would "water down" people's vote.

Hamilton's manager of elections, Tony Fallis, said last year that if the city adopted a ranked ballot system it would cause "confusion" among electors.

The clerk of the city of Niagara Falls, Clerk Dean Iorfida, said:

"Ranked ballots may work in some jurisdictions but to me in municipal elections, where there is no party affiliation, the first-past-the-post system makes the most sense. With the ranked ballot system, you could have a competitive multi-candidate race where the person with the most first-place votes does not win the seat."

In fact, according to a research paper from the Minnesota House of Representatives, in 1915 a form of ranked voting was deemed unconstitutional by the Minnesota Supreme Court because it had the effect of giving some voters the weight of more than one vote relative to the other voters in the same election. A judge in San Francisco recently made a similar comment when ruling on a challenge there.

It's clear from these resolutions and comments that there isn't universal support for ranked ballots. There may be some communities where people want them and

some where they don't. That's why we need to ensure that the people are consulted when municipalities are considering a change to the electoral system. A referendum is the only objective and fair way to ensure that the change is supported by the majority of the voters.

During the debate on the Electoral System Referendum Act, which was brought forward by this government, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said, "A decision to change electoral systems should not be taken lightly. Regular elections allowing citizens to choose who will represent them and govern are the foundation of our democracy, and so we have developed a referendum process so that Ontarians can make a choice on the future of the electoral system by which they elect members to this Legislature." I couldn't agree with her more.

Holding a referendum is protection for voters. Without that requirement, there's nothing to stop governments from changing the electoral system to benefit themselves and keep themselves in power. A government that receives more money from a particular group could decide that it's the only group allowed to donate. They could change the election date to a time when their supporters are more likely to come out and vote, or they could simply extend their term and put off the election. Elections do not belong to the government, at any level; they belong to the people who vote in them, and those people should get a say in how their democracy is run.

Other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world have recognized that. British Columbia has held two referendums, in 2005 and 2009, on the question of whether to change to a single transferable vote electoral system. That is a form of proportional representation in which each constituency elects a group of members based on the percentage of the votes received.

In 2005, Prince Edward Island rejected an electoral reform proposal, with 25 districts voting no in the referendum versus two that voted yes.

London, England, had a referendum in which the people supported the change to an alternative voting system to elect their Lord Mayor. However, in 2011, when the United Kingdom held a referendum on whether the people wanted to change the voting system, more than two thirds of the people voted no.

Often, in the debates about ranked ballots, people point to examples in American cities, where they generally refer to this electoral system as instant runoff voting. What people fail to mention when they cite these examples is that the referendum or ballot initiative on the proposal to change the electoral system was taken to the people before it was implemented. Every one of them had that. San Francisco implemented instant runoff voting in 2004, but only after it passed a ballot measure in March 2002 with 55% of the vote.

In 2004, the people of Berkeley, California, passed a ballot measure to change to instant runoff voting.

In November 2005, Takoma Park, Maryland, passed a referendum or advisory ballot on instant runoff voting before they used it to fill a by-election two years later.

In November 2007, the people of Aspen approved a charter amendment to implement instant runoff voting. After one election, concerns were raised, and the question was again put to the people in November 2010. They voted to repeal the instant runoff voting.

In 2005, 55% of the voters in Burlington, Vermont, voted to support instant runoff voting. Instant runoff voting was used in two elections. On the second election, the person who was in the lead after the first round and the second round ended up losing by 3%. Citizens gathered enough signatures to put the question to the voters on whether they wanted to revert to first-past-the-post. The organizer of the group said, "I was an early supporter of IRV ... But I've been disappointed in the way it has worked. I think it has proven itself to be a disservice to the voters. I think it's extremely convoluted and that voters don't understand how it works." The people of Burlington voted to go back to a first-past-the-post system.

In November 2006, the people of Oakland, California, approved a ballot measure that would require instant runoff or ranked ballot elections. Oakland is an interesting example of what can happen with ranked ballot elections. In the 2010 election, the candidate who was strongly in first place after the first ballot ended up losing with 49% of the vote. According to reports, after the first ballot, Jean Quan received just 24% of the first-place votes to her main opponent, Don Perata's, 35%. However, as the other candidates dropped off and their votes were redistributed, Quan ended up with 51% and won the election.

That example raises questions. Who is the more democratic choice, the person who was first choice by 35% of the people and second choice by an additional 14%, or the person who was first choice by 24% of the people, but second choice by 27% of the people? I think that's a question that only the voters have a right to decide.

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The Oakland examples raise questions because one report stated that 10% of the 97,940 people who voted in that election made mistakes that reflected fundamental misunderstanding of the ranked ballots. In a race that had only 2% apart, that is a high enough rate of error that it could have changed who became the mayor.

Despite what some critics say, these examples of referendums on electoral reforms show that there are many that are successful. The fact that some fail and some are successful demonstrates that they work.

Also, I want to show that no voting method is clear-cut. There are judgments on which system is more democratic. No government has a right to make those judgments; the right belongs to the people.

It's interesting that we often point to American examples of ranked ballots, and yet a study of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries found that—listen to this, Mr. Speaker—the United States actually has the lowest voter turnout of the 14 countries on that list. So ranked ballots, if that's where

they're doing it the most, are not bringing the people out to vote.

When someone tells me that they don't vote, very often the reason they give is that they don't feel that their vote counts. Does anything send that message to people more than changing the entire voting system without even giving the voters a say? In 2003, Elections Canada conducted a study on voter turnout and found that "people are less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions, do not feel voting is an essential civic act or do not feel the election is competitive enough to make their votes matter to the outcome, either at the national or the local constituency level."

If you want to encourage people to vote and participate in democracy, then we need to respect that democracy. Ontario and all of Canada have a number of groups that have formed with the goal of making our democratic system better, and I want to commend them for that. As I acknowledged earlier, there are some here in Queen's Park today because they believe that a ranked ballot is more democratic. It is one of the great things about our country that democracy belongs to the people and they can participate in it by coming here, speaking at committee hearings, talking to their representatives, signing petitions and, most importantly, voting.

As politicians, we need to respect that. As the group Defend Democracy stated, "Canada's electoral system is the basis of our democracy. Considering the potential impact, no one government or political party has the authority to fundamentally alter our democratic system. If our system is to be reformed, it is up to the people of Canada to decide directly through a referendum."

There will be those who criticize the idea of requiring a referendum as too much work or an unnecessary expense, but the reality is that municipalities are already consulting with their voters by putting referendum questions on the ballot. In the last municipal election, the city of Greater Sudbury had three referendum questions on the ballot regarding dates and times that their retail businesses should be allowed to be open. Based on results of those votes, Greater Sudbury voted to repeal existing bylaws relating to hours of retail establishments during the first meeting of the new term of city council on December 9, 2014.

Bill 181 makes changes to the timing of these ballot questions. The deadline will now be March 1 for municipalities to pass a bylaw to include a question on the ballot, and May 1 for the upper-tier municipalities, school boards or the minister to put the question on the ballot.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there's any reason that we should make it more difficult for municipalities to consult with their people. The government is now proposing that municipalities must have passed a bylaw to put a question on their ballot more than seven months before the election. It can't be because the clerk needs time to design the ballot, because the minister gets an additional two months before his deadline for putting questions on that same ballot. Does the minister think that he is that much more important than municipalities? Or has he simply failed to look at the fact that municipalities are using these ballot referendum questions effectively to consult with their voters?

The Oshawa council was considering changes to their voting system, so they did the right thing and took the question to the people by putting a referendum question on the ballot in 2014. The question was whether to return to the ward voting system, instead of the city-wide voting. The people voted strongly for the ward system, reversing their decision from the previous referendum on the question. The Oshawa council recognized that it should be up to the people to determine how those representatives were elected. During that same municipal election, the city of Kingston put a referendum question on the ballot to ask whether people wanted a casino. It's ironic that this government believes in referendums on whether the people of a municipality want a casino, but not referendums on an issue as important as their municipal voting system.

In an interview when she was first elected, the member from Kingston said, "The question of whether there is a casino in Kingston should be left to the citizens of this community to decide. I applaud city council for holding a referendum on the casino issue and allowing Kingstonians to have their voice heard."

While the lack of public consultation required for changes to the electoral system is what will determine our vote on this bill, it is not the only change that this bill makes.

There are some aspects of this bill that are positive, but there are also some sections that are causing confusion and concern. One of those is the new requirement for municipal candidates to get 25 signatures in order to register. Some people have argued that that's too easy for people to register as a municipal candidate. They point to the Eglinton–Lawrence ward in Toronto, where the winning councillor received only 17% of the vote because there were 16 candidates on the ballot, splitting the vote. In fact, there were three candidates that received less than 100 votes.

While a requirement for signatures might help address this concern, the way this bill is written makes this requirement ineffective. The candidate is required to collect 25 signatures, each with a declaration that the person is an eligible voter in the municipality, not the ward specifically. So that means, in the case of the Eglinton–Lawrence ward, candidates simply had to get 25 signatures of people from anywhere in Toronto.

But the requirement is actually weaker than that. The way the act is written is, "The clerk is entitled to rely upon the information filed by the candidate...." Mr. Speaker, I've been a municipal candidate enough times to know that when you're bringing your nomination paper, the clerk verifies the signature with the voters list, and if it doesn't match, you have to get more signatures.

There also seems to be some confusion about the impact of this bill on donations from trade unions and

corporations. This may be of some interest to you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that some stakeholders have been given the impression that under this bill, those donations will be banned. Let's be clear: This bill will give municipalities the ability to pass a bylaw banning donations from trade unions or corporations.

I support giving municipalities more authority to make decisions. We know they are a responsible level of government. What I disagree with is people who try to describe this bill as doing more than it actually does. This bill only gives municipalities the option to prohibit those donations by passing a bylaw. It does not require it. If none of the municipalities choose to pass that bylaw, then the corporations will still be allowed to donate up to $5,000 to candidates in each municipality, which means they could donate more than $22 million across Ontario.

This bill also does not prohibit corporations and trade unions from third-party advertising unless the municipality passes a bylaw preventing these organizations from contributing to campaigns.

Most of the rules applied to third-party advertising look like they've been copied from the rules that apply to candidates and campaigns. For instance, the bill contains a strange loophole that allows someone who is not normally a resident to contribute to third-party advertising if their spouse is a registered third party.

Similar to the rules for the candidates, this bill allows contributions to third-party advertisers of $25 or less, with no record of who was making the donation. For organized groups, especially organizations working across the province, this loophole may create an opportunity for misuse.

Copying the rules fails to recognize some of the significant differences between third-party advertisers and candidates. For example, if a candidate fails to file their financial documents after an election, they will now have 30 days in which to pay up, or pay a $500 late filing fee, after which they could then be removed from office and not allowed to register for the next election.

For an individual with a career in politics, removal from office and not being allowed to run in the next election is a very significant penalty. In fact, it's so significant that when councillors applied to the courts, it was often overturned.

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When a Woolwich township councillor—and I expect you would know this one, Mr. Speaker—had been acclaimed, and appeared in court after the last election to appeal the punishment, the judge was actually apologizing to him for his being stuck in this position. Now, we have to look at it: He didn't actually run an election. He was acclaimed. But you still have to file your election return and he had missed the deadline. He got his seat back.

However, this bill applies the same rules to third-party advertising. It fails to recognize that if an organization isn't allowed to register as a third party because they failed to file their financial paperwork after the last election, the people behind it can simply create a new organization. It's one of the areas that we should look at in committee to ensure that the restrictions on third-party advertising are effective, if they're going to be there.

But we need to ensure that there are controls on third-party advertising not just at the municipal level but at the provincial level. I think the minister spoke to that already. This came up in Municipal Elections Act review submissions. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association said that the discussions on third-party advertising should "consider, in a proportionate way, any provisions currently put in place with regard to the third-party advertising rules applicable for provincial and federal elections."

On Friday, our leader announced six steps that we want to see to clean up political fundraising in Ontario. That would include all three levels of government. One of those was to put legislative limits on political advertising by third parties. We believe that elections must be fair. Without legislative limits on political advertising by third parties, special-interest groups will continue to make a mockery of the system. In 2014, special interests purchased almost $9 million in political advertising. Groups like Working Families spent millions to influence the outcome of the last few elections.

In his report following the election, Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer stated, "Of the jurisdictions in Canada that regulate third-party advertising, Ontario is the only one where third parties do not face advertising spending or contribution limits. The Chief Electoral Officer believes that this reality could very well produce a situation in which parties and candidates campaign on an uneven playing field.

"All other political entities in the electoral process are subject to spending and contribution limits as well as greater reporting and disclosure requirements. The rules related to third parties are not consistent with how all other political entities are treated and should be strengthened to promote greater transparency."

We called on the government to address this problem and they ignored it. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound put forward a bill called An Act to amend the Election Finances Act with respect to third party election advertising, which would have put limits on the third-party advertising. The government, of course, voted it down. Third-party spending limits have been promised at the provincial level before, and we're still waiting for real action. Now that this government has taken a step to put them in place for municipalities, we need to see them at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that there are some positives in the bill, such as addressing corporation and union donations, and I hope that the government will support our amendments to make this bill democratic so that we can support all of the other measures.

One of the other things that is a step in the right direction is shortening the campaign period. Instead of beginning on January 1, under this bill candidates will not be able to file their registration until May 1. While most people agree with shortening the campaign period,

there's been a lot of debate about what the right date is for it to start to ensure that new candidates have the opportunity to meet the voters and that all the candidates have the opportunity to fundraise.

Mr. Speaker, in provincial politics, riding associations have the ability to fundraise throughout the term. But in municipal politics, candidates cannot raise any money until they have registered. To address this, AMO proposed that candidates be allowed to begin fundraising as of January 2 but that the campaign begin on June 1. Instead, the government has set both dates as May 1. I look forward to hearing from municipalities, AMO and other organizations to see whether this is achieving the right balance.

While this bill shortens the campaign period by starting it later, it oddly makes a change that may result in the active campaign being longer. In the past, the cut-off for nominations was the second Friday in September. That meant that people could wait until Labour Day to register, and in some cases until then to finalize their decision to run. The government has moved that date to the fourth Friday in July. That means that instead of the final campaign period being six weeks, it will now be 13 weeks. That's two weeks longer than the last federal election campaign, which the Premier called unusual, unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

While 13 weeks of advertisements, signs, debates and fundraising may be exhausting for the general public, it has a far bigger impact on municipal employees because they are required to take a leave of absence to run for municipal office. This means municipal employees who choose to run will now have to take 13 weeks away from their jobs. That's 13 weeks with no pay and, for the municipality, 13 weeks of scrambling to find someone to fill that position. That's going to convince some good people with municipal knowledge that it isn't worth the risk of running for office. And it doesn't just include people working in the township office; it includes all municipal employees, such as firefighters, municipal police, paramedics and many more.

Mr. Speaker, municipal employees need to take a leave of absence beginning in July, but their campaigning is limited because they can't get the candidates' voters list until September. Imagine the challenges that will be created for someone running for a school board who needs to identify the people who are voting for the school board they're running for.

While municipal employees previously had to take a leave of absence for a six-week campaign, the Municipal Elections Act was very clear that for this purpose volunteer firefighters were not municipal employees, which allowed them to continue to serve their community. The bill repeals that section. That means that people who are giving back to their community by serving as a volunteer firefighter are not allowed to volunteer during the 13 weeks of the writ.

Volunteer fire departments are in small communities where there isn't the tax base or the volume for a full-time professional department. In some of these municipalities, preventing candidates from volunteering will leave the fire department short of people over those three months. But if their neighbour's house catches on fire, our volunteers are supposed to just watch because they aren't a firefighter during the three-month campaign. I just don't believe that's reasonable to expect. That doesn't make any sense.

Volunteer firefighters are people who believe in public service and giving back to their community. Aren't those the types of people we want to encourage to run for municipal council? Is this the first step towards preventing volunteer firefighters from volunteering while they are serving on council?

The lack of consultation with people regarding changes to the electoral system is not the only way this bill shows disrespect for democracy. Section 31 of the bill says: "If, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council"—and we know that's the Premier's office with the cabinet around the table—"it is necessary or desirable in order to further the purposes of this section and this act, the regulation may vary the operation of any of the following provisions of this act or may provide that any of the following provisions do not apply with respect to a ranked ballot election." It tells you that they can do anything they want with the ranked ballots. This means that everything we are debating in this Legislature, everything that the public is commenting on in committee, everything we pass in clause-by-clause and in this Legislature can all be overruled by regulation behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, the bill lists 10 sections of the bill that can be overruled by regulation, from the rights of candidates and scrutineers to the counting of votes to court orders. Even worse is the final point under the section which allows regulation to overrule "such other provisions of this act as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers appropriate." That means the government can overrule every single part of the Municipal Elections Act with regulations written behind closed doors. There's no requirement for them to consult with the Legislature, municipalities or the people who vote in municipal elections. That doesn't show respect for democracy, it doesn't show respect for the legislative process, and it definitely doesn't show respect for municipalities that took the time to put together submissions on changes needed and that will, given the opportunity, come to committee to tell us what other changes are needed.

We know that this bill is missing details around ranked ballots and the need for a referendum. Let's look at what else the municipalities requested that's not addressed in this bill.

A number of municipalities and organizations, including the city of Cambridge, suggested increasing the fee for candidates. This would help to ensure that the people running are serious candidates. In 2014, there were over 40 candidates for mayor of Toronto, and 22 of those candidates received less than 200 votes each.

Last summer, Joanne Chianello of the Ottawa Citizen wrote a column on the municipal election review, and in

it she criticized the limited time municipalities had to submit comments, given the importance of the topic. She also put forward some suggestions for municipal elections, including increasing the nomination fee. She said, "More than 120 people registered as ward candidates in the last election. Eight signed up to run for mayor. And while participation in the democratic process is a good thing, the low bar to entry—$100 to run for council, $200 for mayor—did invite many non-serious folks to join the race, adding to the noise of campaign and making it that much harder for some voters to focus on the issues." Under this bill, the nomination fee is now a personal expense, so any increase would have to be evaluated to ensure that it doesn't become a barrier to people running for office.

There are a couple of other issues that came up in the municipal elections review that are outside of the Municipal Elections Act. One of them was the timing of the new council to hold inaugural meetings, and I spoke to AMO about that—I'm sure the minister remembers. Numerous groups suggested that the lame-duck period was too long. AMO recommended that the municipalities be given the flexibility to hold the first meeting 18 to 39 days after the election so they would have the freedom to address local circumstances. I know that the government is still conducting municipal legislation review, and I encourage them to address that issue.

One of the other things that we heard after the last municipal election and throughout the Municipal Elections Act review was about the inaccuracy of the voters list. As the municipality of Huron-Kinloss said in their submission, "It has repeatedly been identified by staff and council that the accuracy of the voters list is the biggest challenge to municipal elections." In fact, MPAC's election information specialist, Syd Howes, told Hamilton township council that the accuracy of the list was decreasing. In the 2014 election, it was 7% less accurate than four years before. The town of Kawartha Lakes reported that staff made close to 11,000 changes to the list, or 16% of the electorate, where the elector was deceased or had an incorrect mailing address.

A number of municipal officials complained that the province's review of the Municipal Elections Act was too focused on ranked ballots when, in fact, the issue with the voters list was a much bigger problem for municipal elections. While there have been some steps towards improving the problems with the voters list in this bill, such as allowing the clerk to remove names without a hearing, I don't believe these changes have solved the problem. I hope that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has taken steps to address this problem and will share those with us. Otherwise, municipalities, once again, will be left to pay the price.

Another thing that municipalities and AMO asked for in this bill was the authority and responsibility for clerks. We support that. However, every time we add a new responsibility and new requirements to report publicly, we need to recognize that there's a cost to that. As the president of AMO, Gary McNamara, said during their conference last summer, "New requirements come at us almost on a daily basis which can feel like death by a thousand cuts. It starts to add up." As we add new burdens, we need to review the existing ones to see which are no longer required. You need to look at what requirements are still written for a world where communication was done by registered mail.

In previous debates, I've repeatedly asked the minister to review the reporting requirements and remove one for each new burden that they are putting on municipalities. Since they have not taken that step yet, I have filed an order paper question asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for a list of the reporting requirements. I look forward to receiving it so that we can look at the cumulative burden.

For instance, the bill adds a requirement for clerks to review contributions to municipal campaigns to look for people who have donated more than the limit of $750 per candidate or $5,000 combined to all candidates in a municipality. That is a change that was requested. It will help to ensure that municipal elections are fair, but it also adds a significant burden on municipal clerks, and that costs time and money. We need to recognize that municipalities have limited resources, and the province continues to ask them to do more and more with less.

It has only been a week since the bill was introduced and even less since it was available on the legislative website. Many municipalities are still reviewing it and have not had time to have discussions at council. We look forward to hearing from them and stakeholder groups as we move forward.

Already we've seen that there are places where the act has addressed what these organizations requested, and there are places where the bill missed the mark. We're looking forward to this bill going to committee so we can put forward an amendment to require municipal referendums. We also look forward to it so that we can hear from municipalities, AMO, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers and others who are impacted by this bill.

However, before it goes to committee, we want to ensure that there is a fulsome debate in this Legislature and that municipalities and municipal organizations have the opportunity to fully analyze the bill. Over the last two years, municipalities have been asked for a lot of comments on significant issues. Sometimes they have been asked to comment on multiple issues at the same time and sometimes with short deadlines. That can be a real challenge for municipalities. We heard about that challenge from smaller municipalities with limited resources, but we also heard about it from bigger municipalities across Ontario.

As the clerk of Niagara Falls said last summer, "Area clerks are meeting with ministry officials in early July. Comments are due July 27. Niagara Falls city council is on our summer schedule. We don't have a meeting between the information session and the deadline for comments."

In their submission, Richmond Hill asked for a minimum 90-day period once the legislation was introduced

for comment and review by municipal council. That was in a submission that they submitted to the ministry last July. I appreciate that the ministry took the time to read and analyze all of the submissions they received, but I just want to make sure that everyone is clear on the timing.

I expect that before we are very far along in this debate, probably sometime this week, the government members will stand up and say that we need to rush the bill through because we're only two years until the start of the next municipal election and municipalities need time to make changes based on the bill. But they don't point out that there has been eight months since the public consultation finished and 18 months since the last municipal election. It would be highly unfair for this government to have taken all that time themselves before introducing the bill and then not give municipalities and stakeholder organizations the time to analyze it and put forward their concerns.

The government has had 18 months. So far, we have had seven days. In fact, the government didn't provide notice to us that they were introducing this bill last Monday until less than two hours before. As of that morning, it wasn't on their schedule. My point is that the government has taken 18 months and now they look like they want us to rush this legislation through. That isn't fair to municipalities, to the candidates who will be running in the next municipal election and to the voters who want to have their voices heard. It isn't fair to the members on the other side of the House who are trying to do their jobs to work with all of these groups to point out flaws in this legislation so they can make it better.

There are a lot of technical amendments to this bill to modernize elections, such as reducing the need for original signatures to allow electronic filing and removing the need for registered mail so that information can be communicated by email. The best people to tell us whether those amendments to the Municipal Elections Act will work are the people who run the elections and have been recent candidates. They're the people who asked for the changes and they have the experience and knowledge to tell us what will work, what won't and what isn't included in this bill that should be modernized.

We also want to ensure that municipalities of different sizes and different regions have different opportunities to talk about the realities of campaigns in their communities. In the last election, the city of Toronto had almost two million eligible voters. That presents some election challenges. During the election, they made over 26,000 corrections to the voters list and added almost 200,000 names. That is more than the number of eligible voters in most municipalities.

Northern communities which cover large areas face a completely different challenge. Communities where people tend to move more frequently face their own challenges with voters lists. We need to hear from all of these municipalities about what in this act works and what needs to be changed. We need to hear where they need more flexibility and where they want clarification. That means we need more time at committee and, before that, we need to give them time to analyze it.

We've seen this government try to rush bills through and limit committee hearings, but when it comes to elections and democracy, we can't afford not to take the time to do it right. We want to work with everyone to make sure that this bill will result in fair, effective and democratic municipal elections. As I said earlier, there is only one way that can happen and only one way that we can support the bill, and that is for this bill to ensure that the voice of the people will be heard by supporting our amendment to require a municipal referendum before allowing changes to the voting system.

Whether it's the people who are in the galleries here today, the busy parents working on two jobs who may never get to city hall or the people who choose to come to our country because of our democracy, all citizens deserve a say in our electoral system. This bill, as currently written, would make it so the only people who have a say over which electoral system is used are the people who directly benefit from it.

No government should have that power. That is why we will be putting forward an amendment to ensure that decisions about our democratic system are made by the people and why we cannot support this bill unless the government agrees to that amendment.

Mr. Speaker, there's widespread belief that there should be a referendum before any electoral changes have been made. A poll with Insights West this February found that nearly two thirds, or 65%, of Canadians said that a referendum should definitely or probably be held on any changes to the electoral system.

Mario Canseco, vice-president of public affairs for Insights West, said, "For all the talk about electoral reform that Canadians have been exposed to over the past few months, the only consensus is on the need to hold a referendum on any proposal that is made...."

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A petition calling on the federal government to hold a referendum before making electoral system changes has garnered over 14,000 signatures in less than four months.

Matthew P. Harrington, a law professor in Montreal, said: "Canadians have always recognized that some substantial consultative process by which the voters themselves get a say is required for significant electoral reform. No province has sought to make changes in its electoral system without one."

It is undemocratic when people benefitting from the changes to the electoral system have the sole authority to make the decision on what system is being used.

As I said at the beginning, changes to our electoral system are a greater responsibility. They require a higher standard and a greater consultation than other legislative changes. That has been demonstrated by London, England, by San Francisco, Oakland, Aspen, Minneapolis, Burlington, Berkeley, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island, and even by Ontario in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the time and to once again show that we understand our greater respon-

sibility and our duty to the people of this democracy. I wish all the best in the debates thus far, and we hope that we can get that democracy built into the bill before it's finished.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate the member for Oxford for his very thorough and well-researched comments about this rather complex bill.

Certainly the low voter turnout in municipal elections is a long-standing concern in the province. I think that it undermines democracy if we don't have healthy participation in the voting process when people go to the polls.

This bill proposes what I see as two very critical tools to help increase voter participation. The first is around changes to campaign contributions. The bill proposes to allow municipalities to prohibit corporations and trade unions from contributing to candidates for city council.

The timing of this bill is quite interesting in that respect because it does come in the midst of the firestorm that we're seeing, as citizens in this province are asking really legitimate questions about the influence of big money and what big money can buy.

We saw, just last week, a report from Campaign Fairness that found that candidates who were supported financially by the development industry—candidates who are running for city council—were twice as likely to get elected as candidates who refused developer money.

The ability for municipal councils to impose rules around developer contributions, corporate contributions and union contributions is important to ensure the integrity of the democratic process, to ensure fairness, accountability and transparency, particularly at the municipal level, given the important role of councils in land use planning.

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to be able to rise in response to the comments from the member from Oxford and also the member from London West.

The member from Oxford did go through the bill and the various aspects of it. I can say, from my perspective of a career of about 20 years in municipal politics, virtually every one of the things that I had heard from both colleagues and the public about what kind of changes needed to be made to municipal elections, most of that is contained in this legislation: a ban on corporate and union donations; shortening the campaign period; making it more stringent for somebody to become a candidate; and yes, the voting process itself has been something that's been thoroughly debated.

Notwithstanding the flip-flop of many of my former colleagues on Toronto council—who quite substantially supported ranked ballots, but magically, after the last municipal campaign, changed their minds, which leads one to question why. They actually, in this last round, said that they oppose ranked ballots. They tacked on a referendum at the end, but they did say that they oppose it.

Our process, which is in this legislation, does actually require a public process before a municipality enacts that change, and that is extremely important. Nobody would ever suggest that there would be no mandatory public process before this kind of change would be made.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that when we're discussing things like campaign reform in this House today, my own druthers is that this bill should go a little bit further. But in terms of the issue of referendums, I find it interesting that when that member was in government, he ignored the will of residents across this province against amalgamation—

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It seems this issue has caused some excitement with some of the members.

I'd like to commend our member from Oxford for his comments. He was a long-time municipal politician before he came here, and a long-time cabinet member. I'm certain that he has lots of experience in municipal politics, probably more than a lot of people in the room.

Anyway, I was glad to hear him go over a number of items, as far as the citizens' assembly, about referendums before making any major changes, and talking about the 60% threshold to pass the ranked ballot, and the issues about recounts. I learned a lot here in the last 60 minutes as the member spoke. It was almost 60 minutes; I think it was about 57 minutes or something. Anyway, it was very interesting when he talked about how they would be tabulated, and a lot of things.

I think there's a lot of information that has to come forward yet. I think, as the member from Oxford said, the sooner we get it to committee and make sure we have those kinds of changes and that kind of debate—and I commend the people who are here in the gallery today who are bringing this forward. But I think there are a lot of concerns, and I'm sure we'll hear more in the afternoon, as we go, on how conflicts could be resolved.

He talked about the different examples down in the United States, where they've had a number of opportunities with ranked ballots and with these types of reforms—where they either haven't gone right or they've had to change them—and about instant runoffs.

I was interested when he said that on ranked ballots, in the countries that were listed, the United States ranks 14th out of 14 in encouraging better turnouts. I think if that's what we're all concerned about—I didn't realize my time is pretty near done here. He raised questions about third-party financing and also the length of the campaign period.

The accuracy of voting lists: As a former returning officer for a number of elections, I understand the accuracy of voting lists. They do not occur. There are real lapses in voter lists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to take part.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to add my two minutes and two cents on Bill 181, An Act to

amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1998 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts, in response to the very thorough and thoughtful comments from the member from Oxford.

I'm looking forward to also hearing from our critic on municipal affairs and housing, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, because this is a significant piece of legislation. There are a lot of pieces in it. For many of the details, I know that we're going to be hashing it out in this room and debating. But the member from Oxford did a good job in succinctly breaking it down in that hour.

In Oshawa, we've had the ward system, and then city-wide, and now we have chosen to go back to the ward system. In municipal politics, part of the fun is crafting a system that answers to the constituents, to the members of the community. The members of the community in Oshawa have made that choice to go back to the ward system. Their voices need to be heard; they need to feel heard.

When we're looking at this piece of legislation and talking about ranked ballots—if that is a way for more of our community members to have their voices heard, to really have that be measured and to make change, then I think that's an important choice for the municipalities to have.

I appreciate that there are organizations like Campaign Fairness and others who are here, not just today but who have obviously been a part of the process and hopefully will continue to be. The whole point of democracy is bringing in all of the different partners and voices, and making sure that it is robust, that there's engagement at all parts and all levels. Otherwise, people are not going to have that faith in the process. This starts a great conversation.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our four questions and comments. I can now return to the member for Oxford for his reply.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from London West, Oshawa, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Sarnia–Lambton for their comments.

I just want to go quickly to the comments about the minister. The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore seemed to suggest that there were actually things written in the bill to deal with how this was going to happen. I'll just point out that's all regulatory. The minister may do all these things, but the bill actually does none of those things. So if the minister doesn't do it, it isn't happening. It's not in the bill.

I just wanted to say, though, that we've talked a lot about having referendums. One thing we didn't talk about was one of the things that I heard a lot about during the consultation: the voters list. One of the things I left out—I have a sheet laying here that I didn't get to—was the submissions that were made from three different areas about the voters list. I just want to read them into the record.

First of all, this is a submission from the city of Cambridge. They recommend, "The voters list should continue to remain the responsibility of MPAC, but greater oversight from the province should be dedicated to ensure that they produce a better product for municipalities."

The second one was from the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers. It said in a position paper, "Creating a voters list is a difficult task, and municipal administrators recognize this. However, municipalities are required to pay MPAC to create the" voters list—the preliminary list of electors—"and then spend additional resources correcting it." They really believe that they have to do far too much correcting. "Several AMCTO members have noted that the current quality relative to costs of the voters list would not be tolerated in any other procurement process. Surely, the standards for fiscal responsibility and proper stewardship of increasingly scarce taxpayer dollars should apply to the voters list as well."

These are comments, Mr. Speaker, that were made about the quality of the voters list. I think the first one says it all. It's not to change what's being done, but to make sure that we become vigilant to make sure it's being done in a way that creates much more accuracy than it's presently doing.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this provincial Parliament on behalf of my residents in Windsor–Tecumseh. Let me begin this afternoon by—

Interjection.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: —yes, thank you—saying welcome to the members of Campaign Fairness and the other civic-minded groups who are here today to hear this debate. I think they have been very successful in some of their lobbying efforts and I complement them on that.

Let me say off the top, as well, that I am concerned about what appears to be a last-minute rush to push this bill through the House. I believe we're seeing the same thing with the Premier's rush on the proposed legislation on political fundraising. It just seems like we're on a treadmill and we're trying to grind some stuff out.

This bill may help the Premier change the channel on that discussion to some extent; however, I still say, why the rush? Why not shop this bill around now that it's written, take it to the people it will affect and travel it around the province? This can be done quickly, Speaker, and we would hear more voices. You've written it now, and now we want to hear more voices. We would be more comfortable with that approach.

People need to have their voices heard as this bill affects every municipal councillor, mayor and school board trustee right across the province. We seem to be in a hurry, all of a sudden, for some reason. I'm not sure why, but I do know that in politics perception can rapidly become reality. Right now, the perception is that this is a rush job and maybe we should slow it down a bit to make sure that we all get more of a clear understanding of what's going on in this bill and how it will impact our lives.

Speaker, let me also say that Bill 181 is an interesting bill, especially around the ranked ballots. I know it's been an issue for some people in Toronto off and on. I hear it's been raised in Ottawa, Hamilton, London and Kingston. There's not a lot of chatter about it down my way, down in the southwest.

Let me also say, at the beginning, that it's the government's job to propose legislation. The opposition's role is to oppose legislation at times, so I may surprise some people today by being supportive of some of the aspects of this bill—not everything. I do have some concerns.

This bill does make changes, such as moving the date for the opening of the nomination period, making sure more attention is paid to accessibility for all voters. Municipalities would have to develop a plan—a real plan—that identifies potential barriers and a plan to remove such barriers, as well as a plan after the election to do a follow-up to gauge the success of the steps that were taken to make the election campaign and voting day barrier-free.

All municipalities would have the authority to ban contributions from unions and corporations. That's something the Campaign Fairness group has been advocating now for quite some time.

There are some points of the bill that are worthy of support. However, other points in there should be subject to closer scrutiny; third-party advertising, for example. We have to make sure we get the wording right in that section, and I'll expand on that at some length in a moment.

Last weekend, I was home in my riding. I actually squeezed in a couple of hours to sit in the recliner and watch some TV. It was a great TV weekend: We had the Masters golf tournament on, the NDP convention from Edmonton, the Blue Jays had a home-opener.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: You didn't go to Edmonton?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I wasn't in Edmonton, no. I was in my comfortable recliner. I was watching TV, flipping through the channels. The very core of this bill got me thinking, as I was sitting there, enjoying changing the channels. I said, "Is that what this bill is? Are we trying to do that here?" Because for days and weeks in this House we've been talking about little else but fundraising scandal after another, after another, after another. Fundraising quotas for cabinet ministers: Some were upfront about it, some said yes, some denied all knowledge about it. The Premier goes and raises $3 million at a big fundraiser, and then she'll stand up in the House and say, "Hey, you other two guys that do fundraisers, stop it. Stop it right now, because I'm going to stop it. You must stop it, too." Here we are in the rainy season, and one member of the family has gone out and bought a very expensive pair of rubber boots with diamonds and fur-lining, and all of a sudden she says, "I have my boots. Don't you guys buy anything for the rainy season. I'm going to stop buying boots. You stop buying your boots, too."

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: When all else fails, shout down the opposition or change the channel—or try to change the channel. Let's give them something to talk about. Speaker, remember that great song? Bonnie Raitt:

People are talkin', talkin' 'bout people,
I hear them whisper....

That song won the Grammy in 1991; it was the record of the year. You must remember the song, Speaker. If you don't, you'll remember the fall of 1990, the provincial election. The Liberal government lost 59 seats, the worst defeat in Liberal history. History may soon repeat itself, Speaker. Yes, I agree. Let's—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh has the floor.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I must have been giving them something to talk about.

Let's talk about fundraising scandals, let's talk about selling Hydro One, let's talk about embarrassing backing down on medical marijuana, let's talk about backing down on doubling prescription drugs for seniors and let's talk about why we're changing the channel this week—or trying to.

We have a bill: ranked ballots and third-party advertising. Well, I like the ranked ballots part up to a point, but what have we learned about third-party advertising? I think it's important to take a look at what we have learned about third-party advertising. We'll go to British Columbia first.

Back in 2008, the BC Liberals capped third-party advertising at $3,000 each, in each constituency, and $150,000 province-wide for a provincial election. To be fair and on the record, the Liberals said that they were going to do it to create a more level playing field so that wealthy individuals wouldn't be able to hijack the election process. We can probably—or most of us can probably agree that that's a good thing. However, the bill had a chilling effect on non-profits and small charities. That's because the BC bill had no low limit, no minimum spending limit. So non-profit volunteers were trying to figure out what the act would mean to them.

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In order to comment in any way on that election, you had to register as having a third-party interest. You could, if you will, sponsor advertising in any form. Many of the non-profits, afraid of losing their charitable status, opted to self-censor and not comment at any time on anything during that election—not a word on their Web pages. That's because the bill—the bill out there was Bill 42—defined election advertising in really broad terms.

Most of us, when we think about advertising platforms, don't think about websites, emails, social media, public forums or petitions, but the BC Liberals threw in all of those platforms, they put them all into their bill, and the kicker was public communication. What is public communication? Public communication that takes a position on any issue associated with a political party or

candidate. If you did that, you had to be registered in British Columbia as a third party. Even if your group only planned to engage in free or low-cost activities, the BC bill would first have you register as a third-party advertiser.

These non-profits couldn't print or distribute leaflets to their neighbours. They couldn't start a Facebook page. Charities and non-profits do have a homepage, most of them. Sometimes these pages post an analysis of government legislation that impacts their mission statement or the purpose for which they exist. The Liberal bill in BC meant that that analysis, which may have been posted on their homepage for a long time—for years, even—suddenly, overnight, became considered as election advertising. In all fairness, does that sound like the government was trying to level the playing field in restricting the most wealthy from hijacking an election? I'm just saying.

I know Ontario's Bill 181 does actually exempt no-cost Facebook posts and the like, along with other advertising that incurs no expenses. That's a good thing. But I'm still a little nervous about what happened in BC, and I think we all should be concerned about it. Citizens were deprived of diverse views. At the end of the election, when these third-party advertisers were forced to file their expense reports—and all third-party advertisers had to do that; and don't forget, it was supposedly brought in to keep the most wealthy from hijacking the election process—232 disclosure reports were filed and more than half of them claimed they spent $500 or less. More than three quarters of them spent less than $2,000.

So what was the purpose of restricting third-party advertising with that approach? What is the real purpose for what is being proposed with this legislation, Bill 181?

Voices that would normally have been heard in BC were silenced. The free speech of smaller organizations was threatened. Groups—and we have them in Ontario here; for example, let me mention the Sierra Club. In British Columbia, the Sierra Club, based on precautionary legal advice, decided to pretty well shut down during the election rather than risk an errant communication and lose their charity status. Speaker, as you know, under federal law, you'll recall that registered charities are prohibited from conducting any partisan political activity. No doubt, that curtailed the ability by this environmental group to have a say, stage a debate, engage the electorate or change the agenda on environmental issues. They couldn't take a position on a candidate, a party or an issue. I, for one, want all voices heard, especially the voices of the environmental movement. Be it on climate change, be it on cap-and-trade or cleaning up the Great Lakes, I want to hear those voices. I don't want them silenced. When we choose the leaders of the future, surely we want to be able to ask them where they stand on the issues nearest and dearest to our hearts.

I think we need time, more time to study aspects of this bill, Bill 181. For example, let's look at Toronto. Toronto allows only individuals to make a campaign donation—no corporations and no unions. Bill 181 would seem to make it illegal for non-individuals, such as community groups well known in the area—the Transit Alliance, CodeRedTO or TTCriders—to incur expenses by promoting better transit options during the entire six-month municipal campaign period. That should cause alarms to be ringing for some of us, if not all of us.

For example, if a municipal candidate in Toronto makes selling off Toronto Hydro as a campaign issue under Bill 181, no community groups would be able to mount a campaign against such a proposal—or in favour of it, for that matter.

Remember, Speaker, a few years ago the Fighting for Life campaign put on by the Canadian Cancer Society? They wanted municipalities to disclose the use of carcinogens. Bill 181 would prevent such a community-minded group from waging such a legitimate environmental campaign ever again in Toronto during a municipal election. And my friends at ACORN would be prevented from remounting its Toronto Tenants Vote campaign.

Last week, I met with the good folks who started Campaign Fairness. I met with the member from Parkdale–High Park, Ms. DiNovo, and we had a chat about the proposed bill. Campaign Fairness has been lobbying for years for aspects of this bill. They were among the first to propose banning corporate and union contributions in municipal election campaigns. This bill would make that an option for all 444 municipalities in Ontario.

Campaign Fairness wanted to limit the impact that the development industry has on municipal elections, and my hat goes off to the volunteers of Campaign Fairness—people such as Bobby Eisenberg, David Donnelly, my friend Jack Gibbons, and Robert MacDermid from the political science department at York.

But, Speaker, think about this for a moment: These folks have been campaigning for years against corporate and union donations in municipal elections. Now, they've been banned in Toronto—not the group but corporate and union donations. But if someone, say, running for mayor of the city of Toronto had as part of her platform a promise to bring back corporate and union donations, under Bill 181, if it isn't changed, the good folks at Campaign Fairness would not be allowed to campaign against the idea of allowing unions and corporations to finance municipal elections.

That, in my opinion, is why we have to look carefully at what has happened in British Columbia—what is still transpiring in British Columbia—and to make sure the wording in Bill 181 works for Ontario, and works for all of us in Ontario.

Until now, BC has been the only province in the country to require registration if an organization or association had plans to discuss election issues, even if they didn't intend to spend money, or very little money, at all. The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, FIPA, was really concerned because the way the law was written, it meant—and here's a quote to remember—an "absolute ban on unregistered" freedom

of "expression is unconstitutional as it applies to things like handwritten signs or electronic communications with a value of zero."

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The BC courts ruled in a 2-1 split decision that the Liberal plan was okay. However, FIPA has been granted leave to appeal that decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. That appeal has yet to be heard. I note, for some strange and unexplained reason, in the province of Ontario the Attorney General has just applied for intervenor status in that Supreme Court case revolving around the BC ban on third-party advertising. So it makes me wonder why, and why this section of the bill is being pushed through now instead of waiting for a ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada. Why not push ahead, for example, with the ranked balloting option for those municipalities that eventually decide that's something they'd wish to consider, as well as the many other unobjectionable parts of the bill—the change in the nomination dates, the emphasis on accessibility and so on—and leave the third-party advertising piece till later?

I raise these points because I read with interest issues raised by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and a study that found BC's third-party advertising rules actually had a chilling effect on the debate during the 2009 provincial election. Voter access to information was reduced as a result of that chill. That study was prepared for the CCPA as well as the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association and the BC Civil Liberties Association. They looked at 60 charities—non-profits, coalitions, labour unions and citizens' groups. Here's a quote:

"Because most non-profits are careful to remain non-partisan, the prospect of being publicly labeled as a 'third-party advertising sponsor' created anxiety for many of the study participants, with some simply choosing to opt out of public engagement during the election entirely.

"More than one in four participant groups self-censored as a result of the rules. Six groups censored public communication activities specifically to avoid having to register as advertising sponsors. Others self-censored due to confusion and/or concerns about the risks of inadvertently breaking the rules.

"Most of the activities groups censored had little to do with commercial advertising. For example, nine groups did not post new material on their websites; four removed existing material from their websites; and four refrained from issuing or endorsing a call for changes to government policy."

Speaker, I hope this next example raises your eyebrows as it did mine: "Particularly troubling is the revelation that five groups avoided commenting in mainstream media stories due to confusion about the rules or a desire to keep a low profile during the campaign and avoid coming to the attention of Elections BC." Big Brother is out there watching in British Columbia.

I hope you would agree, Speaker, that despite whatever good intentions the BC law may have started out with, "the chill effect these rules created went well beyond activities that we would normally think of as advertising, and cast a shadow on quintessential forms of democratic participation and free speech." That's according to one of the co-authors of that study, Heather Whiteside.

The policy director of the BC Civil Liberties Association, Micheal Vonn, says, "The citizens of British Columbia were deprived of the full range of voices that would normally be heard during an election as a result of these rules. Speech rights are our most precious freedom, and are never more vital than during elections."

We don't want this bill, Bill 181, to silence the voices of the community groups in Toronto, be they campaigning for better transit or tenants' rights or anything else.

Speaker, I've mentioned the bill was brought in supposedly so that the big spenders in British Columbia wouldn't be able to hijack the election process. Well, Vince Gogolek is a board member with the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association. He says, "But these rules heavily regulated small spenders—the very groups that should benefit from third-party advertising limits."

These small non-profits and charities studied for this research paper I've been quoting really represent the views of the most vulnerable citizens in society. Yet, as co-author Heather Whiteside puts it, "For these groups to be self-censoring during an election, when their perspectives and voices are most needed, is disturbing."

As I've said, the ranked ballot portion of Bill 181 is okay for those who want it, but the clauses dealing with third-party advertising need more scrutiny.

The BC study did make a number of recommendations that would improve the third-party bill here, including established minimum spending thresholds of $1,000 dollars in a single constituency and $5,000 province-wide before the requirement to register as an advertising sponsor kicks in. That's seen as much better than having them register, even if they engage only in free or very low-cost activities.

Be more distinct in your wording of the bill to get rid of any ambiguities. Tighten up definitions, such as the definition of what constitutes election advertising, so it's easy to interpret and adequately deals with the realities of online communication.

It was also suggested that an exemption be made to exempt volunteer labour from the definition of an election advertising expense, as is the case in BC for political party and candidate expenses.

Another suggestion was to exempt charities from the rules altogether, as they must already demonstrate they are non-partisan and make a contribution to the public good in order to achieve and keep their registered charity status.

The third-party advertising bill in BC started out for provincial elections, but in 2013, based largely on the provincial Bill 48, was enacted to cover municipal elections as well.

The writ period for a provincial election may be as short as a month for the province, but Bill 181 would apply from when nominations open in May until voting day at the end of October. Shutting down free speech for one month is bad enough, but doing it for six months should be concerning to us all.

Speaking of a month, I do find it curious, as I've said, that just a month ago, Ontario's Attorney General applied for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada to jump into the challenge between the government and British Columbia and the province's Freedom of Information and Privacy Association.

There is no question that big money has no place in municipal elections in Ontario, but as we've seen with the BC example, surely—and I'm not calling you Shirley, Speaker—there's a better way than attacking non-profits and charities and undermining their democracy, writing them off as collateral damage in the guise of protecting them from a big money campaign of third-party advertising.

Speaker, there will be an appeal heard at Canada's Supreme Court, and if I may, some quotes from the application for leave to appeal, because they are so germane to whatever wording we may end up with here in Ontario when it comes to third-party advertising as a component to Bill 181: "This case is about political expression and the government onus of proving that such restrictions are justified." This act "imposes an absolute ban on unregistered expression that falls within the very broad definition of election advertising. The applicant takes issue, not with the registration requirement, but with the absence of a minimum threshold for registration....

"Without a minimum threshold, the prohibition includes even homemade signs in windows and bumper stickers. It captures even the smallest expense; the signs of the small voices, lone voices and independent voices are forbidden during election campaigns unless the person has registered" in order to comment; for example, a person protesting outside the Legislature or a courthouse "with a sandwich board covered by banners espousing positions on issues, many of them of a public nature. Those with bumper stickers on vehicles expressing views on environmental or economic matters, those who place signs in home windows or signs on their property expressing support for or disputing a proposal or initiative, and those with picket signs or other messages advancing a point of view on a public issue, all will be affected in the event that the issue leaks into the platforms of a party or candidate during an election" in British Columbia.

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Here's a salient point from this brief, bullet point 10: "In light of the expanding regulatory sphere in Canadian society, the applicant's position is that even when governments have a reasoned apprehension of harm that is sought to be addressed through regulation, courts must use rigour when scrutinizing administrative incursions into fundamental freedoms ... in order to safeguard Canadians' fundamental rights. These incursions can collectively result in a 'regulatory creep' which will have insidious, indeed Orwellian, consequences if allowed to propagate with minimal or no justification, as occurred in this case."

Speaker, let us remind ourselves that this BC bill had no minimum threshold of expenditures, while in other provinces with third-party advertising restrictions—be it $500 or $1,000 or whatever. Without a minimum, the result is that persons who, within a campaign period, make and wear a T-shirt outside of their house that says, "Vote for the environment," or tape a sign on their car window that says, "End poverty," must register as election advertisers or be at jeopardy of a $10,000 fine and a year in jail in British Columbia.

That's why the BC bill is going to the Supreme Court of Canada. They're bringing in blanket coverage in BC merely as a means of administrative convenience. Everyone will be covered to make it easier on the bureaucracy, but at the expense of our democratic freedoms.

The application for leave to appeal, Speaker, also reminds us about government red tape. In the 1980s, the Law Reform Commission of Canada estimated that any individual was subject to more than 40,000 provincial regulatory offences. The Department of Justice counted more than 97,000 federal regulatory offences that we all must live by. Trends may be changing, Speaker, but pervasive regulation remains a fact of our everyday lives.

If the BC Court of Appeal majority judgment is allowed to stand, government will be permitted to brazenly breach the fundamental freedoms, with minimal, if any, justification.

The circumstances and manners in which infringements could be carried out in the expanding regulatory sphere are too numerous to count. The consequences could be devastating to our collective commitment to civil liberties. I would hope those points would be raised by Ontario if they gain intervener status at the Supreme Court on the BC bill, but somehow I doubt that's the Attorney General's intention. Having said that, I do remain curious as to why the rush to judgment on this bill. Why not wait until the BC appeal is heard at the Supreme Court of Canada?

Yes, our Bill 181 has supportive clauses for those municipalities which choose to adopt them, but I'm not convinced that the Liberals are giving the opposition parties, but more importantly, the public—the voters—an adequate opportunity to fully digest the contents of the bill. That's the normal way of doing legislative business: It is customary and courteous to allow the public and the opposition parties time to properly study the bill. There are other bills pending that we could be debating this week. It makes me curious how and why this one jumped the queue, which of course brings me back to changing the channel—switching the conversation, or trying to.

I had to laugh last week, Speaker, when we were discussing the amendments to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. That really was a legislative lesson in how the Liberals work to correct their mistakes, mistakes made

when bills are written and introduced without proper care and attention to detail—and that's why we're recommending caution here.

Speaker, you will recall—you were in the chair—that the member for Nickel Belt spent an hour talking about changes to Bill 178, the Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act. In her opinion, Ms. Gélinas said, the entire act is really about just adding four words to the original bill. That's because the Liberals messed it up by originally saying that those who smoke medical marijuana could do so any time, any place, anywhere they wanted. The four words that were put into the bill were "prescribed products and substances"—four words.

That got me thinking. What other four words might the Liberals have considered when they first realized their mistake with the original wording in the bill? How about "We made a mistake," or "Just covering our actions"? What about "Whoops, did it again," or maybe "We should have consulted," or "Didn't think it through"?

I wonder if they thought about these four words: "We should have listened," or "What were we thinking?"—which naturally leads to these four words: "What were we smoking?" Four words, Speaker, adding "prescribed products and substances," not "Who thought this up?" or "Who can we blame?" or "Not our finest hour." My favourite: "Can we prorogue instead?" How about "We're in trouble now," or "What would Dalton do?"

Speaker, before getting to the four words, I wonder how many four-letter words were tossed about when they first realized what a mess they had made of that legislation. How about—no, I think I'll leave it to your imagination, Speaker. After all, this is a family show.

Speaker, I know you remember the name Stephen Harper, so let's take a relatively short trip back in time. In 2000, Stephen Harper was president of the National Citizens Coalition. He filed a constitutional challenge to the Canada Elections Act. The act stated that third parties are limited to spending a max of $3,000 in each electoral district, or up to a total of $150,000 nationally. Mr. Harper felt spending limits on third parties were an infringement of his right to free expression. They restricted the manner and scope in which he could engage in free speech.

At trial, the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled the limits infringed on section 2(b) of the charter and could not be justified under section 1. The court ruled that the feds had not provided enough evidence to show that spending limits were reasonable. The feds appealed to the Alberta Court of Appeal. That court dismissed the federal appeal and ruled in favour of the lower Alberta court. The feds then took it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

By now, it was 2004. Mr. Harper had changed jobs and was the new leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Supreme Court did rule that limiting spending by third parties during a federal election campaign did violate our guaranteed freedom-of-expression rights. However, they then had to consider whether that violation was reasonable and justifiable, given that the limits imposed were the results of government legislation.

In a split 6-3 decision, the majority of the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the constitutionality of third-party advertising spending limits. Justice Bastarache, writing for the majority, said that these "limits are necessary to prevent the most affluent" citizens "from monopolizing election discourse and consequently depriving their opponents of a reasonable opportunity" to express themselves.

He went on to say that "individuals should have an equal opportunity to participate" in elections, and that third-party advertising limits "seek to create a level playing field for those who wish to engage in the electoral discourse."

Oh, if only it were so, Speaker. If only that BC law I referenced earlier had been written in such a way as not to send a chill through the membership and executives of the non-profits and charities, and held them back from the intent of Justice Bastarache's ruling.

A poorly worded law is wrong; it's a mistake.

1600

Speaker, even though the clock may be broken, twice a day it's right; it's correct. It doesn't mean much the rest of the time we look at it, but twice a day, it will show the correct time.

Writing for the other judges in that Supreme Court 6-3 split decision, Justice McLachlin wrote, for the minority, that the legislation infringed the freedom of expression and the "limiting legislation prevents citizens from effectively communicating their views." The minority judges "considered this a serious incursion on freedom of expression in the political realm. They were of the view that freedom of expression includes the right to attempt to persuade through 'peaceful interchange.' Spending limits impede citizens from effectively communicating through the national media and mail. Instead, citizens are confined to minor local dissemination of their views. The result is that registered political parties and their candidates have the exclusive right to express ideas during an election."

Speaker, I'll conclude that portion with a final note from Justice McLachlin. She said that "Financial limits imposed on citizens' right to express themselves through advertising amount to a virtual ban on their participation in political debate during the election period. The only space left in the 'marketplace of ideas' is for political parties and candidates."

Bill 181 has some merit in many areas. I want to publicly thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for arranging a personal briefing on his proposed bill. We sat down last week with seven staff members from his ministry—Brian is here today—and they walked us through a slide deck outlining the highlights of the bill.

We were told that the ministry received about 3,500 submissions during its consultation on this proposed bill. Most of them concentrated on ranked ballots, campaign finance, enforcement, accessibility and third-party ad-

vertising. Ranked ballots may be a larger issue for voters in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Ottawa and Kingston. They may think about it more there than we do in the rest of the province. But I think it will be interesting to see just how many of the municipalities actually exercise that option and introduce it in time for the next municipal election in 2018.

I'm sure incumbents are out there now, crunching the numbers to see if they can determine if it's in their favour, to their advantage to bring it in. We'll see motions introduced, perhaps. Whether they pass or not will be another matter.

I recognize, of course, that school board trustees will not be subject to the option of ranked ballots at this time, but the door has been left open for that to change in the future.

The shorter period for nominations makes some sense, I guess. For my second term on Windsor city council, I registered in January, to let all would-be challengers know I'd be out there campaigning.

Now candidates won't be able to officially declare their intentions until May 1. That won't stop anyone from holding a news conference in January and saying, "By the way, on May 1, I'll be filing my nomination papers. I'm just letting you know that I'll be out there." They can do that but they can't raise any money and they can't spend any money on their municipal election campaign until May 1.

You'll have to have your nomination papers into the clerk's office by the last Friday in July, as opposed to the second Friday in September. You'll also need 25 eligible voters to sign your nomination papers. If you're in a municipality where there's a ward system, these voters don't have to live in your ward. They just have to be eligible to vote in any other ward within that municipality. Speaker, the reason for that, of course, is that you may be elected in a ward, but when you're speaking at council or voting in council, you're voting on behalf of all the members of your municipality.

I know, Speaker, as I'm sure you do, that we have to do better in formulating a voters list, be it for municipal, provincial or federal elections. I see that the current working group looking at that will continue to identify and pursue long-term solutions for an improved voters list, and that's a good thing.

I think everyone in this House, the last time we went knocking on doors, in the last provincial election, found out that the voters list was not so good. It hadn't been updated in a long time, and it hadn't been kept updated for a while.

I've already mentioned that municipal clerks will be tasked with preparing a plan for the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect voters and candidates with disabilities. I think that's a really good thing. I know, in my municipality, the last time, I was approached by people from the hard-of-hearing community, who said that when city council candidates got on our local cable program on Cogeco, because there was no sign interpretation going on at the same time that the candidates were making their pitch, it wasn't all that valuable to the members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. They wanted city council to pay for the interpreter. I proposed that at council, and asked for a report so that would happen at the next election. Unfortunately, I left a year before that term was up and ended up here. I don't know if indeed that happened in the last municipal election down there or not.

It makes sense to have the clerk prepare a plan to identify the barriers that candidates or voters face, and afterwards, after all those barriers are eliminated or most of them are eliminated, to do a follow-up plan to say, "Okay, what worked, what didn't work, and how do we improve on a go-forward basis?"

I've also had a lot to say about third-party advertising. I won't repeat those concerns, except to say the government should take a good, hard look at what is being proposed in this section of the bill, because there are weaknesses in there, and it should be addressed when this bill gets to committee.

The bill will tighten up the rules for any victory celebrations, setting new spending limits on how much you can actually spend on your victory party or your party of support for the volunteers. There are going to be new limits in there as well for any gifts that a candidate may shower upon campaign team members. Those spending limits haven't been introduced yet. They will be set out in regulation later.

There's a new time frame for advance polls. They can't commence until 30 days before voting day, so some snowbirds may have to file a proxy form before heading south.

Let me say thank you again to the citizens' group Campaign Fairness for their determined dedication in pushing the minister to bring in legislation so that all municipalities would have the authority to ban contributions from unions and corporations, should they choose.

Campaign Fairness studied financial contributions made in municipalities located in the Lake Simcoe watershed. That study, by York University associate professor Robert MacDermid, showed that corporations gave more money to candidates than did individual citizens. In the Lake Simcoe watershed and the communities there, developers gave 54% of the total from all corporations, and it was found that 60% of these corporate contributions came from outside the municipality in which the candidates were seeking office.

It sort of makes you wonder.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: What percent?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It says 60% of the corporate—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Amazing.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Amazing. I agree, Minister. It is amazing that 60% of the campaign contributions come from outside the municipality in which the candidates are running. It makes you wonder why.

That study focused on the results of the 2014 municipal elections in Aurora, Barrie, Brock, Bradford West Gwillimbury, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, Innisfil, King, Newmarket, Orillia, Oro-Medonte, Ramara and

Whitchurch–Stouffville. One quarter of the candidates—and there were 300 of them running for municipal council within those municipalities—reported contributions from the development industry. Campaign Fairness holds the opinion that the development industry holds too much sway with municipal representatives in those jurisdictions and elsewhere. The public perception is that councillors may feel beholden to those who help them pay for their election campaigns.

Mind you, it will still be up to the individual municipalities to decide if they believe contributions from labour unions and corporations should be banned in their municipalities. Toronto does have such a ban, and various groups in Toronto have lobbied for ranked ballots as well. Ranked ballots may not be the answer for more than a few Ontario municipalities, but all communities will have the option of looking at that possibility.

1610

There are some good points in this bill, as I've said, and I won't repeat everything that I've said about third-party advertising. However, that portion of the bill needs extra care and caution so that we can get it right. There have been too many examples of poorly written clauses on third-party advertising.

I encourage the Liberals to assign a few staffers to take a look at that section of the bill, because I don't think it's perfect the way it's been presented.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Done.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The minister has just said "Done," so thank you, Minister. Yes, please sharpen that up a bit.

Mr. Bill Walker: I hope it's longer than the third-party fundraising bill I raised in the House.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oh, yes, the third-party fundraising portion.

Interjection: It's okay. The Premier's got that done.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The shorter election period is not a bad thing. I'm sure the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound would agree that the shorter election period is not a bad thing. Making accessibility more of a priority is certainly supportable, overdue, and, by all means, do that.

Applause.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the applause. It gave me a chance to grab a drink of water.

I do have a little bit of reference on the municipal scene. I did spend seven years as a city councillor in Windsor.

Mr. Bill Walker: And a good one, at that.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

During that time, I took advantage of the opportunity to seek office at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I was on that board for three terms, and I was also on the board at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario for three terms, serving once as an AMO vice-president and as chair of the large urban caucus. So I do know a little bit about municipal politics, I do know a little bit about running municipal campaigns, and I know a little bit about municipal financing and municipal campaigns.

I don't know a lot about some of the aspects of this bill, such as the ranked balloting. I've never experienced that. I've read a little bit about it. I'm not yet convinced that a large majority of our 444 municipalities in Ontario will see that as something they want to jump aboard with, but it's an option. This bill will put that out there as an option. Community groups and voters in those municipalities can have input and say on that, whether they think it works for them.

The third-party advertising works in some areas, if it's well written. That's something to look at. Banning corporate and union donations is also something that we need to take a look at.

I will repeat that, as I said in the beginning, for some reason I feel it's rushed. This bill just came forward. I thank the minister again for the presentation, the briefing I had from his staff. That was well received. But it just seems that of all the other bills that are in front of us, this one seems to be getting—I wouldn't call it the bum's rush, Minister; I don't want to call it that, but you're familiar with the term. It just seems that we're pushing this along, pushing it out the door and down into committee. That's not necessarily a bad thing, getting it to committee, but I do hope that we will spend time shaping it and fashioning it in such a way that it can be more approachable and more acceptable to municipalities.

Because it has happened so quickly, I haven't had the opportunity yet to have a full discussion with my friends at AMO to see where they stand on the bill. I know that within our caucus we have yet to actually sit down and have a full and frank discussion on the merits of all of it. I hope we'll do that tomorrow. But I want to thank you for the opportunity to stand today and speak for this length of time on the bill. There are other aspects that I didn't get into, and I heard my friend from Oxford mention several of those as well.

Municipal politicians, to me—being a former one—as the former mayor of Welland will attest to, you are the most approachable because people see you in their community every day.

I get a train down here on Sunday night and I go back home to Windsor on Thursday night, but when I was on city council, no matter where I went in the community, I was engaged every day in issues of a municipal nature. I'm sure it was the same for the member from Kitchener–Waterloo when she served on the school board and as president of the provincial school boards' association. She was approached pretty well every day by members of the community wanting to talk about education matters. When you're a councillor or mayor in a community, you're on the street every day, you're dealing with people every day on municipal issues. I know my phone was always ringing, 24/7. Be it sidewalk issues, snow removal issues, tree-cutting issues, garbage pickup, it didn't matter; the phone was ringing all the time.

You can't get away from municipal politics. As brighter people than me have said, all politics are local,

and there's nothing more local than municipal politics. So when we shape legislation here to make the way elections are held and financed back in our home communities, I think we must take great care that we do so in such a way that there will be no misunderstandings, no ambiguity about what we're trying to do. I think, in all good intentions, we have to put forward legislation that would benefit us all down the road, without challenges.

I'm going to wrap up now because I know there are probably others in the caucus who want to speak to this bill. I want to thank you for your time this afternoon, Speaker.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. You used four-word segments, and you raised some good points.

We want to clean up the act, so we listened to the people. We included AMO. The voters lists matter. Ranked ballots are fairer—easy as one, two, three. A one-year consultation; four days of debate. Standing committees can work. So I begin with that and an undertaking to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, who has a completely different approach than my other critic, to actually get staff looking at some of the issues he's raised. I've already asked staff to go over all the points that have been raised and to specifically come up with a response and/or a change, given those points have been raised. I think the member opposite knows that I'm sincere when I say that. So when we get standing committee, this is about coming up with the best possible bill we can, and we will do that.

Municipalities can have referendums any time they want.

Mr. Bill Walker: How about the Green Energy Act? Tomorrow?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, I'll give you another example. We were told that amalgamation wouldn't occur without consent. Five municipalities had a referendum. The average turnout was 88%, and 97.4% said that they didn't want it. When they were in government, they pushed ahead with it anyway. So don't give us lectures about—

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I enjoyed the presentation by the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He obviously talked a bit about ranked ballots. We know that certainly that stands in contrast to the long-standing tradition of first-past-the-post, which goes back hundreds of years in our British system. It goes back thousands of years, if you think of ancient Greece, for example. Think of the Greek Olympics. Much of that—thousands of years of foot races. The first one to cross the line wins. It's even more simple than what we just heard about previously. Think of the modern marathon. The rules haven't changed. There's a white line to start, a white line to end, and the first person over that white line with the shortest elapsed time wins. Think of horse races. You bet that X horse will win Y race, you know, unless the runner or the candidate's disqualified—maybe the race is cancelled. We've had these rules for many, many years.

1620

July 3 is the Queen's Plate, the 157th running of the Queen's Plate. It's based on first-past-the-post. I will note that just last weekend was Keeneland, down in Kentucky. A Canadian-bred three-year-old won the race at Keeneland. I attended races down there a few years ago with my son Brett. The winner of that race, the horse, is called Shakhimat—Canadian-bred. This horse has an eye on the upcoming Queen's Plate. If it crosses the line first, it wins—pretty simple.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for his thoughtful one-hour lead-in. It's hard, you know, to actually get up and do an hour lead when you have a bill as thick as this, which is amending a number of sections of the Municipal Elections Act and the Municipal Act, without having had the opportunity to have any discussion with your caucus and, perhaps, your researchers and to get legal opinion. He did a great job, having to do that only having heard from the government at this point.

He raised a lot of good points. One of them for me, particularly, is the prohibition of lodging campaign issues or issues around campaign times. When else would you want to lodge an issue, if you haven't been able to get it addressed by your existing municipal council and it continues to be an issue in your riding? I'll take mine, for example: There's an issue going on right now where the conservation authority is becoming more development-interested than they are, perhaps, conservation-interested. There's a huge group of people from probably a dozen or so organizations, as well as 200 or 300 individuals, who are opposed to this. So the best time, of course, for them to start a campaign would be around a municipal election, so that they can try and get people elected who would actually support their movement because, clearly, at this point they don't feel that their issues are getting addressed with the existing municipal council.

I think that this really will have a chilling, silencing effect on people. Certainly for me, freedom of speech and freedom of information is one of our basic rights. Those are my short comments.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It is a pleasure to comment on my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh. I must say I have a lot of respect for the member. We sit on some committees together. We might not agree on certain things, but he certainly has a way to present things. I always listen, Speaker; I always listen.

But one of the comments that I want to dwell on a little bit is the rushing. I hear this over and over again. I'm sure that the members on this side and the members on that side were around when this was launched about a year ago. About a year ago, it was announced that this

was what we were going to do. We embarked on it. So it's about a year. Under 3,500 submissions, Speaker. So I just say that there has been enough, and we're going to do a lot more. As we go through this House, we debate, you talk to your stakeholders, and there will be an opportunity.

I just want to touch on ranked ballots a little bit, Speaker, as you heard me speak specifically about that. Municipalities will have a choice. I suspect that not all 444—whatever it is—are going to jump at this. I think there's going to be a learning curve. There will be some that might and some that don't, and that's a choice that they make.

I mean, I was on council when we made the decision—our council—to do the vote by mail. There was a lot of skepticism, but, man, we had a huge voter turnout. We tried it.

I would say that we're going through this process. We talk about referendums. This really more refers to the previous speaker. I remember the AMO convention in 1998 or 1999 when the then-Minister of Municipal Affairs just did Toronto in and told the rest of us delegates, "Be ready. You're next if you don't do it on your own." That was consultation, Speaker: one announcement at AMO.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, and we return to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for his response.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, the member from Welland and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for their observations on what I've had to say.

If I could, my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West took exception to when I was saying that we were rushing this. It's not the consultation period of a year ago and now we feel rushed; it's that the bill was tabled a week ago and now we're discussing it today. The custom is you table it and it could be weeks later or months later or several months later that we get the opportunity in the House to discuss it. During that length of time, we have had time to consult, call up people who will be affected, get their opinion, talk to some lawyers about the legality of certain clauses and talk about it amongst our own caucus members. We, in the third party, have not caucused this yet at all. I doubt the opposition has taken it to their caucus members for full input yet.

When I talk about "rushed," it's the same way I feel about what the Premier is doing now: rushing through on her spending on the political fundraising issue. It just feels like, "Okay, I've done my fundraising. I know you've got some coming up but put a stop on them because I'm going to bring in legislation."

We have to have more courtesy in the House and more consultation on the length of time that we spend. In this case, I would recommend, since we're doing it in such a hurry, it's not too late—now that the bill has been written, it might be refined in committee—to take it to a few places around the province. Take it to Ottawa, take it to Kingston, take it to Windsor, and actually put it in front of people and get their input—real input on the bill—and then we'll see what we end up with. I would suggest it would be a much better proposition than what's in front of us now.

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

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'll be sharing my time this afternoon, Speaker, with the member for Ottawa South and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

First, I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ted McMeekin. Ted has done a tremendous amount of work on this particular bill and I want to thank him for bringing it forward.

Before I get into my remarks, I have to echo the comments of our member from Northumberland–Quinte West about the idea that somehow this is an attempt to change some channel. At least one year of consultation has gone on, thousands of public comments on this particular bill, and yet it is trying to be framed as somehow other than what it is, and that simply is a review of the Municipal Elections Act that happens as a matter of course after every municipal election. So in that manner, I hope that the people who are following this debate on television will understand that that's what is going on here. There has been a year-long consultation and thousands of submissions. That's why it's here today, for no other reason than that.

The bill is going to deal with a variety of issues; I'm going to focus on one. Just for a highlight for those following on television, it will deal with ranked ballots, campaign financing, the campaign period, accessibility and the voters list, among other things.

I thought, before I get into my comments about ranked ballots, I would do just a couple of other things, and that is to remind people what we're doing here today is providing opportunity and providing choice for the municipal order of government. We are not mandating that they do this. We are providing them, through this legislative change, should it get passed by the will of this Legislature, the opportunity to adopt a different way of electing people in their home ridings. They can choose, if they wish, to hold a referendum or a plebiscite. Again, we are not mandating that they do that. I think we're asking that they hold at least one public meeting so that people can begin to get some awareness of the opportunity that's in front of them, but at the end of the day, municipal councils will have the choice on whether to move forward with the ranked ballot system for electing people in their cities, if they so choose.

1630

Speaker, it's important for me to underline that, before I go into my main comments. That is because I was on council as well, during the Harris years, and I can tell you that the relationship, I would say, between the provincial government of the day and the municipal order of the government at that time was very, very different. I can tell you—and I've said this before here—that's why a lot of people who were municipal councillors at the time

chose to run provincially, because of the way the municipal order of government was treated in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

I just want to underscore that we're providing choice—not mandating—respecting that order of government and letting them decide what they would like to do on a go-forward basis.

I want to speak to ranked ballots a little bit, if I can. I only have four or five more minutes. One of the reasons that this is viewed as being a good idea is that people believe that it will bring more civility to elections. I'm not going to go into what ranked ballots mean. I don't have time to go into the detail of explaining the system, but it's not really that complicated. People also feel that a ranked ballot system may do something around reversing this trend on low voter turnout.

I've never been one who has bought into the reasons why we have low voter turnout, whether it's municipal, provincial or federal. When I hear arguments about needing to change systems to achieve a higher voter turnout in these elections, I bristle a little bit because, quite frankly, I don't think we can do anything to make it any easier than it already is. It doesn't mean this won't make it better, and it may. But it bothers me that there is low voter turnout. We can't make it any easier. People, I think, have just lost the value in a vote and their ability to freely and democratically cast a ballot, and that bothers me greatly.

I have my own theories, and I'd like to talk just a little bit—I only have a few minutes today, as I said. But quite frankly, one of the reasons I believe that there is low voter turnout—and I'm tying this back to one of the reasons why people suggest we should use ranked ballots—is the way we treat ourselves. When you talk about an attitude among members of the public, if you're in the coffee shops in your riding, politicians, I think it's fair to say, are not generally held in very high regard. We can decide whether that's justified or not. But one of the reasons it is the way that it is, I think, is the way we treat ourselves in this place and the way we talk about each other in this place.

I've been blessed since 2003, as I've said before, to be elected four times and, each of those times, to be in government. When you're in government, you've got to take the shots. I don't mind throwing some back either, when I get the opportunity. But that's what we have to do: We have to take them.

But there is so much language and innuendo and smear. I think that when you damage what you think is the brand of the government, you're not just damaging the government. You're damaging all politicians and all brands. If somehow people think that a ranked ballot is going to increase voter participation—it may do that. But I personally think that if you want to help get people more engaged in the political process, if you want to get them to respect this process more, then we should start thinking about how we treat each other. Because when you treat somebody poorly on a personal level, you're doing the same for everybody who is an elected official. That's truly, absolutely what I believe.

I've heard language in here about fundraising scandal—staggering; scandal; fundraising. Everybody has been fundraising, since I came here in 2003, under exactly the same rules, yet from that side to this side, it's a scandal.

Speaker, if I went back, how far would I have to go—I've been here since 2003—to find the first time that a member of the Conservative Party or a member of the NDP stood up in this place and asked for us to change the system on fundraising? When would that first question have come from the leader of the NDP or the leader of the Conservative Party? That's rhetorical, because everybody knows the answer. Everybody just found religion on this issue about three or four weeks ago. But tomorrow morning, when we walk in here in question period, they're probably going to stand again and ask questions to imply to people who follow this debate on television that we're the only party that was fundraising—under the rules, but they will leave that out of their question.

Speaker, I have seven minutes gone already. I would love to talk about this for a greater period of time. What I would say, if I can just take one more minute, is that I remember very clearly the example of a federal cabinet minister who basically got run out of town because she had bought a $16 glass of orange juice when she was on a trip overseas. I can remember talking about this with a variety of members, and everybody was having a great joke about it. I can remember saying, "This is terrible. Why should this woman lose her job over spending $16 on a glass of orange juice?" Why shouldn't the rules be such that that lady could have—if it's a per diem, for goodness' sakes, the person she had breakfast with might have spent 30 bucks. She lost her job over it. Everybody had great fun with it.

If we want to do something about increasing voter turnout and getting people more engaged in the political process, I would say it has more to do with how we treat each other—as someone who has been the subject of personal spears in election campaigns by one particular party—rather than worrying about, necessarily, any grand legislative change, although I do hope that at the end of the day, to the minister, this legislative change goes somewhere in the direction of increasing voter turnout.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I too want to congratulate the minister for putting this bill forward. I know how hard he's worked on it and I know the level of consultation that has gone on in this bill with the public, municipal councils, AMO and staff from across the province. So I want to congratulate him on that.

I want to echo, a little bit later on, the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources, but first I want to say a few things about what's in this bill.

What it does provide is a greater degree of transparency and accountability in the municipal electoral process.

One of the provisions in this bill is going to provide for ranked ballots. I'm ambivalent on ranked ballots, but if indeed it does do what it says, which is to raise the level of participation in elections and take down the level of rhetoric and personal attacks that occur during municipal elections sometimes—because people have to gain the support of people who would support other candidates—then I think that's a good thing. It's an option, of course, that's left up to municipalities. I know that the minister talked a little earlier about campaign finance and I'd like to say a few things about that a little later on.

The campaign period for municipal elections, I always believed, was ridiculously long in terms of when people had to indicate their interest. It gave an advantage to incumbents. I believe that by shortening this, that you've—being an incumbent, maybe I shouldn't—not a municipal incumbent. But I think in order to open up the playing field, to shorten that period of time is an important provision.

Improving the voters lists: I know that I'm echoing the comments from the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. We need to make sure that we can get people off the list, that they can get on the list, and that it's not a complex exercise so that we don't put up barriers to people being able to vote, simply because we can't get a process right. We have to make that available to municipalities.

Also, accessibility: We do have the AODA. There's a change to ensure that there has to be a plan for people with disabilities. I know, for instance, in my community, Terry Green is an advocate for those people who have disabilities. He's blind. He first worked on ensuring people who had a vision impairment were able to vote in municipal elections. I know he did a lot of work—a little bit of a shout-out to him right now.

There needs to be a plan. As our society ages, problems with accessibility and disability are going to increase and so I think that provision in the bill is a very, very important thing.

I would like to talk about campaign finance. These measures here, that we allow municipalities the choice of whether or not they want to accept corporate and union donations—I know we've had some discussion here in the Legislature about what we're going to do moving forward. At this point, I was listening to the Minister of Natural Resources, and he's absolutely right. Ford or GM or Honda would never go out and say, "You know what? Nissan cars are going to kill you." You want to know why? Because it damages the brand. But what it really damages is the category. The kind of discussions that we have here with each other—and it's on all sides. I thought we might need to get some hip waders during question period, with the amount of mud that was getting slung around. We don't do ourselves any favours.

1640

I really firmly believe that in this Legislature all people are here for the right reason. All people are working hard for people inside their communities. The reality is, we all need to raise money for our campaigns. We all really care about our communities. I think that when we get down to where we've been, it is really not giving the people of this province an accurate representation of what I see around me and what I see across from me.

So I think we all need to think about how we talk to each other and about the kind of words we use to ascribe actions to other people. I think that's a very important point and I want to thank the minister for making that.

As a few final words, I would like to say again that I do believe that this is a good bill. I understand what the member from Windsor–Tecumseh was saying and his concerns around consultation. There has been a broad consultation on this bill. We have a process by which we'll take it through here.

We do have to remember that municipal elections are coming up in two years, so I think that giving councils and voters in municipalities enough advance warning about the ability—and enough room—to use the tools that are provided for in this bill is a prudent thing to do. I think we can have a fulsome debate, a fulsome discussion, fulsome work at committee and get this bill passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Orazietti: I'm pleased to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I want to lend my support as well to our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the great work that he has done in moving this legislation forward and the contributions that all sides of the House have made toward improving legislation that governs our municipalities.

I know that we've received over 3,400 submissions in terms of how this legislation can be improved. I think those of us who have served on municipal councils in our respective communities understand just how important this work is and how important it is to ensure that there are consistent ground rules in communities all over Ontario that help to strengthen our electoral system at the municipal level.

There are a couple of key areas, Speaker, that have been identified. First of all, ranked ballots: Municipalities will have the option to be able to determine whether or not they would like to proceed with that particular initiative. That's a discussion—as with a number of these other areas—that municipalities will have with their own citizens in their communities in terms of some of those particulars, ranked ballots being one of them.

As well, campaign financing rules or changes that could be put in place by a municipality: Municipalities can determine whether or not they'd like to, in fact, ban corporate or union contributions. It's important that municipalities have those tools at their discretion and that as mature levels of government they are able to make that determination when they have those conversations with their citizens.

I think there are a couple of other things that are related to the financing that would help to strengthen the legislation; first of all, around refunds for nominations to

candidates and the filing of their election information and financial statements. I know in the past, and in various communities, this happens: Individuals decide that they are, for whatever reason, not going to file their financial statements. That's obviously problematic. I know in our community that happened—I believe in the last election or the time before—which prohibited somebody from running in the next election if they didn't file by the appropriate deadline. I think using the refund nomination fees as a bit of a lever to encourage people to comply with this regulation is really important, and also having clerks be required to make a public report of which candidates have filed their financial statements and which did not. That increases, obviously, accountability and transparency for local municipalities.

On the aspect of campaign financing in the broader discussion we're having—and I certainly share the comments of my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources, who I think has effectively articulated why we have an issue with campaign financing. We've all been required to raise funds for political endeavours, for election campaigns, to move forward in the political process. That's something that all political parties have had to do and that's something that likely all political parties will need to do going forward. We all do that as members of the Legislature and we do that within the rules that are laid out, and we'll continue to do that with respect to whatever those rules may look like as we're going forward. The Premier has indicated that conversations will be held with members of the opposition and leaders of the opposition, in fact, to get a better sense of how we, as a Legislature, should be dealing with this issue so that the public has confidence in the democratic system that we have in Ontario.

Speaker, with respect to the campaign period, as someone who has participated in several municipal campaigns, I couldn't agree more that the length and time of the campaign period is far too long. I think most elected municipal representatives would agree. So I think that the changes that are proposed speak to that and are ones that are very positive, as well as accessibility and having responsibility for reviewing legislation across government and working with my colleagues to ensure accessibility through legislation in our ministry. I think this is also an important element of the new legislation that will help to improve accessibility for individuals and municipalities.

Another item that is important to, obviously, the municipal process is the voters list. We know what challenges we've had with voters lists in the past. In some communities, it has been more problematic than in others. Greater consistency and greater opportunity to ensure that all those who are eligible to participate in an election can do so is incredibly important.

Again, I want to thank the minister for his leadership on this and encourage all members of the Legislature to support this bill.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we heard, two of the members opposite did raise the issue of campaign financing and fundraising scandals. My position, really, is that big money has skewed policy, it's skewing decision-making, and I consider it a threat to our long tradition of democracy. It fosters lobbying, it fosters influence-peddling and it obviously fosters political advertising.

Down my way, there is cynicism and there is distrust of what many consider a rigged system, a system bought and paid for by those who are wealthy and those who are powerful. It's time to curtail the lobbyists and the influence of special interests and take the big money out of the process. When you do that, you give the power back to the elected representative.

We have a system now where someone who is beholden to their benefactor hands that power over to that person who is raising the money for them. It skews the system, whether it's $9 million in political advertising by third parties during an election process or the donations that have been mentioned across the way from companies, unions, individuals, non-profit organizations and other shadow organizations that pull things together, both provincially and at the riding level.

I sincerely feel that the system we have is broken, it's corrupt and it's not to be trusted. I think people are correct when they see an elected representative no longer representing the people who voted them in and essentially serving as a puppet of those who are writing the cheques.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to commend the minister. Certainly, anything to do municipally becomes very complicated, with all the different factors that have to be dealt with, as well as the opinions of local mayors and other bodies, whether it be conservation authorities or other bodies that are dealing with the municipalities on a more regular basis as opposed to here in Toronto and Ottawa. It certainly can become a maze, and the minister has to work through that maze. I commend him for doing it. It's a tough thing to follow.

In reference to the Minister of Natural Resources, I agree with him also that the public perception of politicians is very low, and lots of times, we are our own worst enemies. But secondly, media plays a part in this as well. A lot of times, the media starts the ball rolling about donations and things. If it's legally done, I don't know why they do that. If it's illegal and they've got something, certainly bring it forward, and it should be dealt with appropriately. I think a lot of times, the politicians in this Legislature bite on what the media says, and the media sits up there and smiles as the war starts between "You did this" and "You raised this" and "You raised that," and they're up there smiling and selling papers. I'm not quite sure that that's fair either.

In reference to the financial influence—or peddling, if you want to use that word—large donations are certainly noticed by the party that's being donated to, and it may

have some kind of influence on the final decision. We hope it doesn't, but I'm afraid that it would be a little naive to think it doesn't. So it does play a role.

I think that once we get this straightened out and get to a real set of rules, where nobody can go one way or the other, and where we have to follow a perfect set of rules that will affect this situation, I think we'll be a lot better off for it, and hopefully we can be a little nicer.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I appreciate the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the member from Ottawa South and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. They all touched on some really good points. My friend and colleague from Hamilton did as well, and also remember the member from the Conservative side.

It is broke. The best political advice I ever got was from a dairy farmer out in Rockton, when I was running for mayor. He said, "Ted, do you want to get elected mayor? Tell the folk what's broke and how you're going to fix it." So whenever I get stuck, I think about that. What's broke and how do we fix it? We certainly have been doing that kind of thinking here.

I believe we can work together. I think this isn't perfect. We'll get it to the standing committee. I'm quite open: If there are ways we can improve this bill, let's do it together. I'm open to that. I'm open to that because we need to have a relationship of trusted motive here. I don't always agree with what my friend from Hamilton East says, but do you know what? I've always believed he means what he says, thought we may not agree.

I remember once being at a meeting out in my constituency. I think it was about the HST. There was a big crowd there and I was getting hammered. It was in the early stages. This older fellow got up and said, "You know, there's not a single thing that your blankety-blank government's done, Ted, that I agree with." People stood and gave him an ovation, and he said, "No, no. Sit down. Stop clapping. I want to tell you something. While I don't agree with a darn thing Ted and his government have done, I vote—and I'm a Conservative—for him in every election. Do you know why? Because he's never looked me in the eye once and lied to me." Right? It makes a difference, that trusted motive sense there.

I think we can do that. Easy as one, two, three, potentially, on ranked ballots—

Hon. David Orazietti: Two seconds.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'll stop there. Thanks very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to be speaking for 20 minutes, so I'm going to focus most of my time on this. Minister Mauro, the Minister of Natural Resources, and I are on the same wavelength. He made some really good points. Just changing the system doesn't necessarily change voter turnout and how many people are engaged. What he talked about was how we treat each other in here. I want to commend the minister. We have had a very good personal relationship. I believe he does the right thing—in the case that I've had the privilege to be in his honour. He normally acknowledges us. He makes sure we're aware. He makes sure that the people who are in his midst know that we're all elected representatives. I applaud him for doing that.

I want to point out today, however, that one of his colleagues was in my riding giving out just shy of a million dollars—and that's great for my riding, and I'm appreciative—but I knew nothing about it till 20 to 5 on Friday afternoon. I have my duty day; I had to speak to this bill today, and I had Parkinson's in my office today, and also the Ontario Medical Students Association. I wasn't cancelling them at the last second because someone else didn't have the decency to let me know in time.

They do not hand out Liberal money; they hand out Ontario taxpayer money. Some will maybe say, "Well, it has always been done. That's the way it's done." That doesn't mean it should be the way it's done. It shouldn't be the way it's done. In fact, you have honour and decency—and that's how we raise the level in here. This isn't a one-off. That particular minister has done this to me before. Other members of the government have done that. I think it starts with leadership that says that's not acceptable, period. If you're coming into my riding to do anything, you should have the decency to give me as much forewarning as possible so that I can be on record as well and, wherever possible, be there.

I believe there are some very good members who do the right thing, like Minister Mauro, and I congratulate him and I applaud him for that. But at the end of the day, we've got to walk the talk and all serve in the same capacity to do that, especially outside of this room here. Lots of things get done in here, but when we're in our ridings—I was elected by the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I should be the person who's consulted and made aware of that, as all of us in our respective cases should be. So I hope the government will actually do that.

Minister Mauro, thank you for leading the charge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Ottawa South will reply.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to begin by thanking the members from Haldimand–Norfolk, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—and I take his point very clearly: You should be there. That's always the way that I operate, and many people on this side do. It is a two-way street. There are sometimes some issues of trust that we have to work together on to be able to do that.

What I want to say is specifically about the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his willingness to work with members on all sides of this Legislature to try to make this bill better. That's a sincere expression of the kind of person that he is, and it gives me faith in how things work here.

The tone of this debate this afternoon—we've had some discussion about campaign finance, and if we had been having it at 10:30 this morning, it wouldn't have sounded the way that it did in here. I was glad that the member from Haldimand–Norfolk didn't make any distinction about who he was talking about, didn't make distinctions about people on the other side of the aisle—and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

The reality is, when people elect us, they expect us to work together. When we actually get to the point where we are really working at cross purposes—instead of that tension and balance that's needed between opposition and government—and we get off track on things that aren't central to the things that are most important to Ontarians, then I think we're doing them a disservice.

Again, I want to congratulate the minister. I think this is an excellent bill. I think it will address some critical issues inside municipal elections. I want to thank him for his candour and his openness to any suggestions that you might have.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill, and I want to applaud my colleague Ernie Hardeman, the member from Oxford, a long-time municipal politician. He was the mayor. He went on to be called warden, although I believe, through him, he was actually more of a regional chair; it doesn't really matter. He became chair of ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. So he comes from a strong history and pedigree of talking about municipal politics.

I think what he has shared with us most succinctly in here today is that it's the respect for democracy, and that the referendum would be required before anything is going to be moved forward, particularly to gain support from our party. I believe he is prepared to support to get to second reading so that it can actually be debated and have amendments, a key amendment being that there is time for a referendum to ensure municipalities—the Minister of Municipal Affairs just stood in the House and said he is open to ways to improve. I'm hopeful again. He said he's sincere, and people vote for him for that. So I believe that at the end of the day, this is one.

1700

He talked about the ability for referendums in communities, but I want to remind him that in the Green Energy Act, there is no ability for the local municipality. They've changed and they've tweaked it for them to have a little say, but there's no ability for them to say not. My colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, in this House just a week ago—he has a community called Dutton that was not a willing host, and they ended up with wind turbines in their backyard. So that's not a referendum opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

In my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, I continually hear from people who want the ability to have a referendum and that the local municipal council be given back the power to say, on behalf of their people who come out and say, in overwhelming numbers, "We don't want it"—at the end of the day, I believe there's opportunity here to continue to improve a lot of legislation, and I believe that there's an opportunity for that minister to take that forward with the Green Energy Act.

We truly believe that there's opportunity to improve a lot of the legislation. I think it's a good thing that we're reviewing and modernizing our rules. I believe we look forward, particularly through our critic, to reviewing the bill; to working with municipal officials to ensure it reflects what they need to run modern, accessible, democratic and effective municipal elections; and to consulting them broadly, to ensure that we understand what they're asking for, and to bringing their concerns and amendments, positive and critical, to this House for proper debate. That's the whole idea of getting to second reading, getting to committee, so that we can have that back-and-forth and ensure that it's the best legislation going.

We do, however, have concerns that many of the important details of this bill, such as the details of ranked ballot elections, are in regulation and not subject to the parliamentary process. I believe that for something as fundamental as how people are going to vote, it is absolutely critical that it's done in this House, through the Legislature, and not by someone in a backroom writing a regulation that we have no ability—once they put it through and the minister signs off, it actually is the law. We need to have that debate.

We need to also ensure that there's public scrutiny of those types of things. That is open, participatory democracy at work. When we start taking that away, regardless of whether it's purposeful or inadvertent, we're doing a discredit to the people of Ontario. We've talked through a little bit, here this afternoon, why the population is not as engaged, why the voter turnout is down. It is things like that. When you take away their ability to participate, to have their voice heard, then you start to see apathy happening and people saying, "Ah, what the heck. I'm not coming back. I'm not going to go out and vote tonight, because what does it really matter?"

I think there's an opportunity always. Something as simplistic, but fundamental to democracy, as the vote—to change how you're going to vote in your system—has to be done in open quarters. You have to have debate, you have to have transparency and you have to allow the broader electorate to have their say.

The public consultation is absolutely critical on this bill. To have people not be able to have a say through a referendum on something as significant and fundamental as changing how you vote is absolutely—you just cannot allow that to happen. I can't even get the word out. It's unacceptable that we would not allow the people, who are going to be the most impacted by something as significant as a change to that, to have a full say.

Electoral reform belongs to the voter—not to one party, not to one group, not to special interests, but to all people to have that say. My colleague the member from Oxford pointed out to me, when we were chatting about this, that it's interesting that the government opposite will

allow a municipality to have a referendum on where a casino goes, but not for something as fundamental to our democracy as how we vote.

I want to extend this to the federal government in power currently. They're looking at changing the electoral system. I certainly appeal to them that they do the same thing, that they make it open to every voter of Canada before they make any change, particularly a one-sided one that only gets decided in their rooms, or a regulation like this government is proposing to do to make those changes.

There's a number of areas in this that I'm going to try to get through in just my short 20 minutes. Third-party advertising is a big piece of it. Under Bill 181, third-party advertisers have to register with the municipality, display their name and contact information on their signs, and be subject to contribution and spending limits. Campaign contribution restrictions, including municipal bylaws to prohibit contributions from trade unions and corporations, would also apply to third-party fundraising.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. I have introduced third-party advertising as my private member's bill. I just wanted to remind the people listening at home and who may read Hansard later that I did that back in October. My colleague Rick Nicholls did it back in 2013-14, and Ted Arnott did it back as far as 2011. So this has come up a number of times. My bill was there as recently as October 2015, and the Liberal government over there unanimously voted it down. It's interesting that they keep spinning that, "I want to take action. I want to jump to the floor and I want to change all of this because it's not right."

It's interesting that they just had their heritage dinner, their biggest fundraiser ever, and they didn't change anything just before that dinner. I just want to make sure that the people out there understand that this isn't something that they're just jumping through because it's the right thing to do; they truly got caught.

The other distinction is that we don't hand out contracts. They keep throwing it back that we accept fundraising money. You're right; we all accept fundraising money, but we don't sign contracts. We're not the government. There's a significant distinction there, Mr. Speaker.

Provincially, third parties don't have contribution and spending limits during writ periods, so it's interesting that a government that won't actually vote for my bill to limit some of those things is suggesting to municipalities, "You should do it and we're going to give you the power to do it." It's kind of one of those "do as I say but not as I do" quotes, if I can throw that out there.

The principle of ensuring that there are limits—and no one is trying to quash the ability for people to have their say, but there need to be limits. There needs to be fairness. My colleague Norm Miller from Parry Sound–Muskoka raised that earlier today: There need to be fair limits. As a politician who's going to run, I want to know that I have a fair playing field, that it's equal to all and that I'm not going to have some group out there that's going to outspend me 25 to 1 and I can do nothing about that. That's significant.

Mr. Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer—this is one of his top priorities. It has been in his last two reports. It's part of the reason why I brought it forward in my private member's bill, assuming that all parties would want to ensure that there's fairness and that democracy is actually what we put on the pedestal, that that's the thing that we're all here about—not self-serving interests, not clinging to power, but that we ensure that democracy and the ability for every single person to have a fair and equal opportunity to play a role is enshrined in our value system.

Having democracy where every single person has a free vote and free speech is absolutely fundamental and is one of the greatest privileges that those people who gave their lives and made the ultimate sacrifice ensured that we as Canadians and Ontarians have.

Mr. Essensa, too, has called on the government to make elections fair by capping third-party fundraising. I think his findings are important as they speak to the serious trouble brewing in our election process. Just look at the evidence, not from Bill Walker but Mr. Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer. In the 2007 election, third parties spent $1.8 million. In the 2011 election, they spent $6 million. In 2014, $8.6 million—a jump of 400%, or a tripling, since 2007. Mr. Speaker, that's a significant amount of money, with no limitation there. That is just not fair in anyone's eyes. I don't think the general electorate out there would believe that that's fair to anyone, that there is unlimited spending. Putting caps on, like almost every province has—the federal government has. I'm not certain, again, why this party is so adamant unless there is really something, that they're saying, "Oh, that may impact me. I want to cling to power."

That's not right. Do the right thing for the people that you've been given the privilege and honour to come here to serve. I'm going to just repeat: They voted down all three of those bills that came forward, the premise being fairness and ensuring that all people play by the exact same ground rules, the same game, that the same rules apply to all. Why did they not? I think they have to answer to their constituents why they didn't and not play this, "We're just jumping in now and we're going to change the world because we just thought of it."

There is pressure put on. There are concerns being raised by the public, by the media, by the opposition. That is our job, by the way. When there are challenges in the system, when we think there is something not being done properly, that is our job on behalf of the people of Ontario: to stand up and challenge them and make them accountable.

We believe elections must be fair, where everyone gets a fair shot. Campaign contributions—a quick summary: The bill does not prevent campaign contributions from unions and corporations. It simply gives municipalities the authority to pass a bylaw restricting these contributions. Currently, donations of $10 or less are not considered contributions. This bill increases that amount

to $25. There's a new spending limit on holding parties and other expressions of appreciation after voting closes.

It's interesting that we're changing it from $10 to $25. For some people, $10 could mean the world to them. That could be a big amount of money. I'm not certain where that one came from. We'll let that one come out in debate in committee.

1710

My challenge and recommendation to the government is to embrace our efforts, to ensure that people have their say in committee, as the minister has agreed to do. Open to ways to improve: If we bring good amendments through on behalf of the people, I believe—and I hope he is going to be sincere. Very similar to Bill 100; I've stood up in my riding on Bill 100, a government bill. I believe there are some really good things in there but there are two or three significant things that I've heard, particularly from the landowner associations in my riding. I have said to them, "You put your exact words and I'll walk that to the minister and I'll ensure that there's no saying that we didn't see it, we didn't hear it, and hold them"—the Deputy Premier suggested the other day in the House that she liked that I was actually supporting their bill. I said that was with a qualifier: I will do it with significant pieces. The easements and transferability of easements are the two main, key points.

If you're truly sincere and there's nothing to hide, you'll put it in explicit black-and-white writing in your document before it's ever voted on in this House. If they don't do that, then it raises suspicion of what they are perhaps trying to hide, or if they at least won't come right out and put it there, then there's a reason.

At that point, I've told the people in my riding who have called me on that—I have lots of people supporting me. They think it's a good piece of legislation. I have some user groups that are concerned about those two specifics and I put it back to trust of this government. You can't stand in this House and say, "Trust me. We'll do the right thing," and then not put those types of things into your bill. This is very similar.

I hope the party opposite, the Liberal Party, and their leadership will not be afraid of elections with limited third-party spending at the provincial level. If they're saying it's good enough for municipal folks, why would they not accept that for their own purposes? We keep hearing, "We're going to talk and we've sent out letters to the two leaders and we're going to do this." That's only lip service if you don't truly listen and put in what's best for Ontarians, not what's best for you and your collective organization or, in this case, political party.

Controlling expenditures does not limit influence, but it does let them run rampant if you don't control it. We have to have caps, again, that everyone is aware of. Everybody has the same game rules, everyone has the same significant ability to fundraise to the same level and to spend the same amount of money. Third parties that they actually have a connection to can unduly influence an election, and that terrifies me. For any of us, why we would give up a profession, a life, a career, to come and serve—I believe it's one of the most honourable opportunities and professions in the world. To be able to serve the public is to me truly a noble calling, but you have to go into that knowing you're going to have a fair playing field so you can go and do your job that way.

Last Friday, our party leader and I released our caucus's six-point plan to clean up political financing in Ontario. In addition to calling for an immediate public inquiry, we were asking for the creation of a special select committee with equal representation from all parties that will take place in public with input from across the province. It can't be done by one party, regardless of political stripe, frankly. I'd be saying the same thing if it was us on that side of the House—so that the appearances are that everyone has the ability to have input.

Limits to third-party, special-interest advertising absolutely have a fundamental, key role. As I've said here numerous times already today, we need to ensure that we all can play on a fair and level playing field. A complete phase-out of union and corporate donations, an end to ministerial fundraising targets, and a strengthening of lobbying restrictions are all things, in the greater good, that will protect us.

Serious allegations have been raised in the media as to the conduct of this Liberal government and the perception is growing that it may have turned doing government business into a money-making machine for the Ontario Liberal Party. That's unfortunate but it is what's out there. It's what has been brought and, again, that discussion needs to be had and it needs to be resolved to the satisfaction of the general public. They need to be part of that to ensure, regardless of what has happened, that it can't continue going forward.

Ontarians have lost trust in you—I think that's part of why there's apathy—and we need to restore that. One of the ways is a gesture of goodwill and good faith to say, "We're open to an all-party select committee so we can all create the rules for everyone going forward."

Liberals don't want to talk about their past conduct. They'll only talk about changing the rules now, as I say, because they got caught. That's just the reality of the situation. A full investigation is required if we're going to get to this. The people of Ontario need to know the truth.

Ranked ballots: The bill gives municipalities the right to implement a ranked ballot system beginning with the next municipal elections in 2018. This bill includes very few details, leaving everything, including any regulation regarding public consultation, to a later date.

We are particularly concerned, as my good colleague from Oxford—who is very well versed in municipal politics, as are members like Perth–Wellington and a number of my colleagues who have served municipally and bring very factual, detailed experience to the table. My colleague from the NDP, Mr. Hatfield, has served municipally, and I enjoyed his context of what the debate is today.

But we're very concerned. I want to make it explicitly clear that no government should be making unilateral

changes to the system under which they will be getting elected—provincial, municipal and, I hope, at the end of the day, the federal government, because they're also considering significant changes to our electoral process and our electoral system. They need to ensure that every single Canadian and, in our case, every single Ontarian has the ability to have their fair say and ensure that they, at the end of the day, have their vote that they believe counts. Because if we don't—I agree here, again, with the Minister of Natural Resources—engage them and they don't believe they are part of the process, we'll find those numbers going even lower. I hope that doesn't happen. We can do much better to ensure that everyone is part of it.

The Premier said, in no uncertain terms, that she would not be making changes without consulting first. I've got a quote from 2014. Kathleen Wynne said, "We were the party that opened the discussion and put the referendum on the ballot. So, I think it is clear that we are open to having these discussions."

Even a past Liberal minister, Jim Watson, who served as Minister of Municipal Affairs from 2007 to 2010 and is now the mayor of Ottawa, said that he didn't approve of this change. Just last week, he was quoted as saying, "When I go into the ballot box I vote for my first choice, and I want my first choice to win, not my second or third choice." Another quote: "I don't believe the vast majority of people, when they go into a balloting station, want to go and water down their vote by voting for their second or third choice on the ballot."

Listen to what the current Minister of Municipal Affairs said on the lack of a referendum requirement: "Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it." We think local democracy needs more protection than "So be it."

I wish he would support the same principle, as I said in this House a little bit earlier—and, yes, it was a bit of a shout-out, perhaps, while he was talking—and his cabinet colleagues, specifically the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Energy: to do the same thing for the Green Energy Act and allow municipalities to have a referendum in regard to putting in wind turbines, being willing or non-willing hosts, and not forcing them, particularly those who come out with a majority of their residents, the people who are actually going to be impacted, saying, "We're a non-willing host." And yet you're going to put those in their communities.

Again, I challenge the minister. You can't have double standards. You can't pick and choose when you're going to allow the people to have their choice, when it's something as significant as wind turbines or a municipal referendum. He said that they can choose it. Mr. Speaker, they have to stand and walk the talk.

I wanted to just get it on record that last summer Grey county, one of my great counties, passed a motion to not support the change. In my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Grey county, which represents nine municipalities, considered and rejected this change. So there's a significant number of people.

The city of Toronto, in October 2015, passed a resolution recommending that the province not proceed with an amendment to the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked choice voting.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish where I began, and that is that we truly have to respect and honour democracy. We have to truly respect and honour the people who need to participate, if we're going to truly honour those that gave up their lives to allow us freedom of speech and freedom of vote. We need to ensure that electoral reform does belong to the voters, and that the voter will have the final say.

The minister has said that he's open to ways to improve. If the people loudly say, "We want a referendum before you make any changes to any kind of a voting system," I challenge him to be that honest and sincere minister who will actually do the right thing, do the honourable thing and ensure that the people of Ontario are the ones who own democracy.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always a pleasure to follow my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He brings great passion every time he stands up in the House. Today, he's talking about respecting and honouring democracy, and about the way we could be changing the way we vote. He sees it as a fundamental change in democracy. I would hope that we could travel this bill to get more people to have a say.

Speaker, I don't consider myself an apologist for the minister in any way, but I would say to my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound that the wording in this bill does allow your municipality or any municipality in the province to hold a referendum should they so choose and ask the members of their municipality directly, "Do you want to adopt this change in the way we do our voting? And if so, we'll do it in our subsequent election in 2022."

1720

We do have the ability within this bill to ask our municipalities if they want to go to a direct vote of the people, or they can do public consultation or whatever to get a feel in each and every one of our municipalities to see if ranked balloting is the way we choose to go. I don't think a lot of people are going to go that way. I could be proven wrong, but it is an option out there for the municipalities.

I believe it's the same thing, that they could determine a ban on corporate and union financing for municipal candidates. Individual municipalities have that ability to hold their own referendum on whether this is the way they want to do it for themselves, whatever works in their community. We used to call it a Windsor solution, a made-in-Windsor solution, but it doesn't have to be imposed by the province.

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

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his comments, but, again, when I spoke a little while ago for eight or 10 minutes on

this, I talked about the fundraising issue. The member spoke about this for quite a while in his 20 minutes and I must say I do take some offence.

I spoke about how the rules are the same for everyone on fundraising and that nobody in either opposition party raised this issue until two, four or six weeks ago. The member then would say back, however, "That's okay because we don't award contracts. The government awards the contracts." The inference is, of course, that people are buying influence. So it is offensive, and I guess it's okay that because we're government, then the rules would apply to us differently than they would apply to them.

I would say also to the member, I would ask him to consider this: If the implication is that the fundraising rules are not good enough because we're in government, that they'd be good enough for you because you are—what about when we were in a minority government position in the Legislature? What about when, combined, the Conservatives and the NDP together as two caucuses had more votes than the Liberals did in 2011? We were the government still, but combined you had more votes. What about when you walked into committee? What about when private members' bills were introduced into the Legislature? What about when the legislative agenda was being debated?

I could make the same inference back to you, that on a case-by-case, issue-by-issue basis the Conservative and NDP caucuses would get together, they'd have a discussion and they would decide, "You know what? This isn't good enough," but remembering that while you're having those discussions, the same fundraising rules are applying to you. You could make the case very strongly, I would say, that in committees, on private members' bills and on the legislative agenda, you were able to provide that same level of influence, if I was so inclined to provide that inference, but I won't. I would just measure it and lay it out there for perhaps others to give some consideration to.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to add some comments to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I wanted to just read into the record some of the requests that a great group who came to my office last week talked to me about. It was Campaign Fairness. It was a great meeting by some young people and they had specific requests regarding changes to the Municipal Elections Act:

(1) Ban corporate and union contributions to municipal election campaigns; encourage support from individuals by requiring contribution rebate programs;

(2) Limit contributions from any one person to $3,000 total, for any number of candidates in the same municipality;

(3) Include external campaign labour under employer's contributions; include time worked on a campaign by a paid employee as part of an employer's contribution and subject to the normal limits;

(4) Improve regulation and oversight by including a section in the Municipal Elections Act that gives the municipal clerk's office the responsibility to review candidate financial statements for completeness, and require revisions if improperly filed.

It was a great meeting. They put a lot of thought into this. I know the minister has probably met with them a number of times as well. They were in the House earlier on and I really wanted to get that into the record because they put a lot of thought into this legislation, and they provided good feedback to all members in this House. I do hope that the minister takes some of the things that they talked about under consideration to make it into this bill. There are a lot of these that I do support and hope to see in the final piece of legislation, in the final law. We know, from the provincial level and the federal level, that we need to clean up the corporate and union contributions, first and foremost. I agree with a lot of the things that Campaign Fairness said.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound feels very strongly about this issue as it relates to Bill 181. I have to say we agree with a lot of the comments around third-party advertising, around corporate and union donations.

I just want to say—I want to emphasize this—that process does matter. It matters, because when you follow a thorough, transparent and accountable process, you get a very good response.

Quite honestly, there are some questions and some trust issues around this government and the manner in which they develop policy, the way that they develop legislation. Quite honestly, you can't blame us for having some outstanding questions, going forward, around how this legislation will look. Will it accomplish its goals of strengthening democracy? Who will it benefit? These are still outstanding questions. The bill was only tabled a week ago.

The leader of the NDP and the leader of the PC Party just met with the Premier, half an hour ago or 45 minutes ago. The premise of that meeting was, "We're going to sit down and we're going to talk about this fundraising issue. We're going to talk about an open process." No sooner had those two leaders left that meeting than the Premier released her recommendations on how fundraising rules are going to be developed in the province of Ontario. So you cannot blame us for having some outstanding questions as to how this is going to be developed.

Quite honestly, the questions that came out last week around, in particular—one news thing was that seven renewable energy companies donated $255,000 to the Liberal Party, and then those very same companies benefited from government contracts.

Those are outstanding questions that need to be answered in an open and transparent manner.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound can now reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to thank the members.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh: I always enjoy his comments. What I was really getting at—and he did point to a piece of clarification, that they can have some referendum ideas, but at the end of the day, there's still a lot of this written in regulation. It's not in this House; it's not in front of the people. You can have discussions in public and say it's public consultation, but how much does the public really understand of the matter? I still have big concerns about that.

The Minister of Natural Resources brought a lot of things in here. I have great respect for him. But he says no one brought up this idea. Well, if there was nothing wrong, why, all of a sudden, is the Premier in such a hurry to fix it and have a meeting?

I'm just learning now that she has already put out a press release, 15 or 20 minutes, maybe half an hour, after the initial discussion. You would think you might want to go back and reflect and actually have a bit more in-depth conversations with people.

He used the word "inference" a lot. What were people inferring? I'm hearing from people in my riding that they're inferring—and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo just brought up the word "trust." There are a lot of people who have concerns with the trust. When issues like fundraising come up, it's very challenging, if they're not prepared to step up and really have the conversation, to have that level of trust.

They had their heritage dinner, the biggest fundraiser they've ever had, and then all of a sudden, they wanted to rush and review and revisit fundraising rules. If there was nothing wrong, what's the big rush all of a sudden, just because we inferred that there might be some wrongdoing going on?

Lambton–Kent–Middlesex brought up a good point. To Campaign Fairness—any group that is working to ensure that democracy is alive and respected and well in our province—I applaud them and I thank them for doing their democratic duty.

At the end of the day—I've said it here a number of times—electoral reform belongs to the voter. For any level of government that is going to change any significant way that we're going to vote, that people are going to have access to democracy, it has to be done by referendum and a full and comprehensive process, to ensure they own democracy.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for further debate, I'm going to remind members on all sides of the House that we are, in fact, debating Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts. We're not debating what might have happened at the meeting this afternoon; we're not re-debating what took place at question period concerning provincial fundraising. We're talking about Bill 181, and I would ask all members to make their comments relevant to Bill 181. Please.

Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's good to have an opportunity to get up and speak about Bill 181. In reference to keeping our remarks to the bill, anytime we're talking about trust and respect in the Legislature as they relate to democracy, I don't think that that's actually going too far.

As some of the members raised those issues today, it became clear to me that trust is a two-way street. The member who just spoke, from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for example, talked about government funding announcements and how members routinely are not invited at all, or at the last minute, to attend events. That doesn't actually create really good trust between members of the opposition parties and members on the government side.

I've experienced that myself. In my own riding during the Pan Am Games, where we spent billions of dollars, there was a huge announcement for a $10-million building. I had been the mayor of the city, I had been responsible, in part, for the creation of the Welland Recreational Canal Corp., and I was not invited to the event. When I attended the event in my riding, people were saying, "Why aren't you up on the stage making a speech about this great thing that's going to be happening here in our community?" I said, "I wasn't invited." I'm down here with my constituents, right? I'm doing the right thing. So I think trust is a two-way street. We need to get better about doing that, because it is taxpayers' dollars at the end of the day.

This is an important bill, and I know that a review of the Municipal Act happens on a regular basis after municipal elections. I've got about a 20-year span where I was involved in municipal politics: as a city councillor, as the mayor and as a regional councillor in my community. I ran six elections in my own community over the years.

There are certainly some good pieces to this bill. I haven't had an opportunity to read all 65 pages of it as yet—maybe it will be some bedtime reading over the next couple of weeks—but I have to agree with many people who have actually spoken to this bill today to say that, yes, although the government did announce that they were going out to consult on the Municipal Act one year ago, they only tabled it a few days ago. It is a big piece of legislation. Really, they should have given some more time between when they tabled it to when we're actually debating it to give all of us the opportunity to go back and talk to our colleagues and our caucus, to talk to perhaps some legal experts and to talk to our stakeholders. We sometimes share stakeholders, but in many instances we have different stakeholders that have interests in these kinds of issues.

I think that once again, this bill is going to get pushed through. Certainly in this session, we've had a huge history of that being followed by time allocation. We've heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he's open and transparent about hearing what we have to say about the bill, or if we have any changes, he certainly wants to hear about them. But we know just recently—and I think this may partially fall under his portfolio as

well; I spoke to it briefly last week in a questions-and-comments section, where during the budget bill process—and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo was there—the NDP had nine or 10 amendments which would have improved accessibility for those people with sight and hearing issues by improving the communication available on that particular piece of legislation. The government, in that case, voted against every one of those nine or 10—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It was 11.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —11 amendments. The government voted against all of those amendments, which would have allowed improved access for probably more than a million people with disabilities in this province in a way that would have provided them with easier access to the bill. So when you hear that the government is open to perhaps hearing about these amendments to the bill, then you go into committee and they vote down every one of those amendments, it doesn't give you much trust. Would you agree?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I would.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes. Instead, they just voted down those things and they refused to do anything for the kind of disabled community in that regard.

Now, we support some sections of this bill that will strengthen local democracy and that will get the influence of big money out of election campaigns. However, I don't think that we're going to have enough time in this process to hear from all the proponents. This is a bill that could have been travelled and probably should be travelled to the Far North, the northwest, the northeast and the southwest to hear from folks, because many of our municipal councils won't have the opportunity to actually make it here to Toronto to have a say in what they want to do. This government has not had the best track record when it comes to giving opposition parties, as well as government members, the opportunity to go out, travel bills and hear from people the legislation impacts.

We're going to take a close look at the bill over the next few days. I hope we have time to come back with some amendments that would generally improve it.

The bill seeks to make several changes. There was a lot of discussion today about changing the period of time from January to May. I think the member from Windsor–Tecumseh spoke about how you can still go out and actually canvass; you just can't spend money doing it. So changing that date can advantage or disadvantage.

I've been in both of those situations, where I've been the incumbent. It can be a disadvantage because while you're still the mayor in a full-time job and a regional councillor in a part-time job, there isn't much opportunity for you to go out and canvass. Yes, you might be out at some council meetings and you might be on TV, but you certainly don't have time to go and do door-to-door things and canvass, while your opposition, who has registered in January, may have lots of time, depending on the kind of work he or she is doing, to go out and knock on every door in your city or town.

Then there's the issue of financing of those campaigns. I can tell you that in my area, I've seen people spend upwards of $40,000 to $50,000 to run in a regional seat for a job that actually pays $30,000 a year. So, lots of money from developers—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Trustees, as well.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Trustees, as well—and city councillors. I've seen people run right alongside of them and only spend $3,000. Certainly you can buy a campaign if you have enough money to do a lot of advertising, a lot of signage, a lot of newspaper ads.

The piece about endorsements: 25 eligible voters must endorse the nomination of a candidate for office. That happens now in provincial and federal elections. I don't see it as a barrier. Surely you've got 25 friends who will sign your nomination papers.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speak for yourself.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I don't think that is too onerous.

The eligibility to vote: Now, there's this piece about regulations governing who is and who isn't a tenant. For me, I would need some clarity around that before I could support it. Do you have to be a paying tenant or not? Are you just couch surfing because you're homeless? Is it a family member or a friend, who is like a non-paying tenant? Who is going to determine what that definition of eligibility actually is for a tenant?

1740

Ranked ballots: Certainly, this issue has been before us in the past—probably about two years ago now. In some of the larger cities, this may be a big issue for people. In Toronto, certainly, there was a lot of lobbying done back in, I think, 2014. In other areas of the province, it may not be much of an issue. Using an example of a by-election a couple of weeks ago in Hamilton where there were 22 candidates for one ward in a municipal election for a city council job: How many choices would you have to make in those kinds of situations to actually come up with somebody who got 50% plus one of the vote when the vote is split 22 ways? So I think it's something that probably needs some consideration during by-elections.

Advertising by candidates: Candidates are required to identify themselves on their election campaign advertisements. I would say that's probably the norm in any event.

I want to make clear to people who are watching on TV here today or who are here today—they may be here today just because they support the ranked balloting piece—this is a big bill and it has nine or 10 areas of change. It's kind of like an omnibus bill in some ways. Often, the government brings these things together in a way that wedges the opposition parties so that they can actually support some of the bill but they can't support other pieces of the bill. I hope that the minister is being genuine when he says that he's prepared to be open and to hear about some, perhaps, good amendments to the bill and that those amendments—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: As long as you can convince us.

Ms. Cindy Forster: That's very hard to do, Minister—that the amendments will actually, perhaps, pass at the end of the day, which is not the norm.

I understand that municipalities are given the option to ban corporate or union donations. Then there's this whole piece about linking the right to campaign for an issue to the right to make campaign donations. I don't quite understand that. Bill 181 could deter municipalities from banning corporate and union donations because that would force municipalities to actually silence non-government organizations, charities and community groups at the same time, not to mention the corporate and union—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Unions and corporations couldn't become third-party advertisers.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I get that.

The federal government as well as several provinces currently restrict third-party advertising in order to limit the influence of big money. However, my understanding is that Bill 181 differs from such legislation in significant ways. As it's written, it would seem that Bill 181 would have a chilling or silencing effect on non-government organizations, charities and community groups during the six-month municipal election period.

My read of the bill—and I may be wrong because I haven't been able to speak to the researchers or the experts yet, but I would think that that would be the time that people want to be lobbying their municipal governments and their regional governments to get their issues moved forward because they haven't been able to do it with the last elected council.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: They could do that; they would just have to register.

Ms. Cindy Forster: As written, Bill 181 seems to place serious restrictions on these groups to advocate during an election period, unless they register. With so little time to have analyzed this bill—

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, the minister seems to want to answer. Maybe we'll have a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay; obviously I have to ask the minister to come to order. The member from Welland has the floor and needs to be given the opportunity to present her remarks uninterrupted. I need to hear them.

The member from Welland has the floor.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Hopefully the government can explain or provide clarity on this piece during debate, during their turn. If not, I'm sure that we will hear all of the perhaps negative aspects of this bill when we get to committee in the coming days and weeks.

I understand that there's a Supreme Court decision under way on this very issue out of British Columbia, and I understand that the Attorney General has now just weighed in and asked for intervenor status, which seems to be quite—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think I was up a minute ago asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs not to interrupt the member for Welland. I think I was. I would say once again, in case he didn't hear, the member for Welland has the floor.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker.

It's quite interesting that the Attorney General would be weighing in on this case at this point in time. What's even more interesting is that this is before us while there is actually a Supreme Court of Canada decision in the works. Why this is even in this bill at this point in time—or why is there such a rush on this bill having known that, in fact, there is a Supreme Court of Canada ruling perhaps about to come down some time in the next couple of months? While we certainly agree with the broader strokes of removing big money out of our local democracy, we need to ensure that we have a more open and transparent electoral process.

I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about some of the things that I experienced provincially, but also that would apply locally. I think they happen in municipal elections as well.

The location of polling stations and the access to those: I can tell you, during the last federal and the last provincial campaigns in my riding, the returning office was far out of the city—and I live in the biggest city in my municipality—and not on a bus route or anywhere near where anybody could actually go to vote every day during the open voting period. Some of the polling stations—in fact, many of them—were not on transportation routes. They were on secondary highways going through the city. A lot of people—seniors with walkers—were unable to even access that particular polling station without a drive. It becomes problematic because it really does suppress voter turnout based on the election.

I also heard from constituents during both of those elections that they could live on Smith Street—and the polling station was on Smith Street—but they fell in a polling station that was as much as four kilometres from their home. They could have walked to the polling station, but the way that it was divided up, they actually had to either get a ride or get on a bus to go and do that.

The things that I think are missing in this bill, that I've seen for the little bit that I've had to read—the issue of permanent residence. There are many people who live in this province. Some of them we meet who have been in this country for 30 or 40 years. They're not Canadian citizens, but they're permanent residents. There's nothing to address their right to vote, even though they've been great contributors to their communities. Municipal government directly impacts them in every way. It isn't addressed in this bill, and I think it's something that the government should really be taking a look at.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: They own homes and pay taxes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: They pay taxes; that's right. They volunteer in their community. They do the food program in their schools. I think that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

The issue of enumerations—the voting lists are so outdated. The turnover in rental units and large apartment buildings—particularly in larger cities, the turnover is

once every 18 months to two years. That information is always out of date, and it's very difficult for people who are running in elections to go out and make contact with people.

The third piece that comes to mind from the last municipal election that I was involved in was the fact that the government and the legislation aren't very good about communicating with apartment building owners and managers about access during municipal elections. In fact, in the last municipal election that I ran in, I had the police called on me. It was 7 o'clock one evening, and the manager of the building had no idea that, under a municipal election, you had the right to go in and canvass that building. When I informed her of that decision—I think I was with someone else who was running for city council—they called the police, and the police came to the building and told me that I had to leave until this was sorted out. So I think we need to do a better job of making sure that everyone is aware of access rights for people who are participating in any election at any level.

1750

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

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm glad that we are back on track, discussing Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

The member for Welland raised the issue of consultation with stakeholders on Bill 181. Perhaps she's unaware of the fact that we did consult with 3,400 people—submissions were received—on how the act can be received. We received this from the public, municipal councils and staff from across the province as part of the consultation process on this.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have reached out to my own municipal stakeholders in my riding of Kitchener Centre, and we had a very good discussion on this. They appreciated that we are doing this well in advance of the 2018 municipal elections to give them sufficient time to prepare for their next election cycle.

On the issue of ranked ballots: This is an option that many local officials have asked for. We see voter turnout in all elections dropping, and we're looking at a number of ideas to try to reverse this trend. In the years that I worked as a journalist, whether I was covering federal, provincial or local elections, this was an ongoing issue: the fact that we see fewer and fewer people who are turning out to vote in elections. Of course, we're always looking for ideas on how to encourage greater voter turnout.

Mr. Speaker, the overall goal is to try to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect how modern campaigns and elections are run. The bill is going to ensure greater transparency and accountability, and it's going to give voters more choices.

I know that people in my riding of Kitchener Centre are certainly going to be looking at how we're going to be debating and voting on this particular bill.

We also want to recognize that many of our front-line services are provided at the local level, and we want to ensure that Ontario is well served by people who are governing us at the municipal level.

I encourage my colleagues to support Bill 181, as I will.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak to this bill. It's such a simple question. It's the fundamental question about the value of democracy, the history of democracy, which is the foundation of everything good about this country and, indeed, this very place: Queen's Park, the Legislative Assembly.

If you look back to the history of democracy, which, as Winston Churchill said, is a terrible form of government; it just happens to be better than all the rest—and it is the very best. It can be sloppy and it can be messy, but every four years or every two years or whatever the voting time period is, people get to choose, with their vote—that wonderful, most powerful tool that the common man has—the people who would represent him or her at whatever level of government they get to vote on. So in spite of the fact that we do experience some apathy in politics on voting day here in Ontario and in most of the western nations, it is still the most powerful and valuable tool we have. Anybody who comes to Canada, as a Canadian, to enjoy the wonderful things that we have—our freedom and our democracy and our Constitution and our rule of law—understands the power of the vote, and they exercise their right. They know how to play the game, and they understand that they have that wonderful right to cast their vote here and determine who represents them and how our country is run.

The idea that we would play with that basic, important, historic, wonderful strength of democracy and the vote and just change it with a bill in the hands of a few versus giving people the right and the vote to choose, through referendum, how they are governed and how they will conduct this wonderful business of electing the people that represent them—it should be by referendum. It should be restored to the people to choose how they're represented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My friend the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane and I were just chattering away, and we've heard so much this afternoon about the Attorney General of Ontario filing for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada to comment on the case from British Columbia on third-party advertising. We're curious, and I hope the Liberals will take this opportunity in their two-minute hit to explain why Ontario is now jumping into the Supreme Court case involving British Columbia and third-party advertising. We're hoping—this is a perfect opportunity—that we would hear from the government to clear up any misunderstanding. The Attorney General is here. We would love to know the answer to that: why, all of a sudden, we have just applied

for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada on the BC case involving third-party advertising in elections. This is a big part of Bill 181, and inquiring minds would like to know. So I hope we can hear that answer.

I just want to follow up a bit on what the member from Welland just said about non-citizens not being given the right to vote in this change to the act. We know they come, they buy huge homes, they pay property taxes—they're paying taxes in Ontario. At the municipal level, they get involved in community groups, community associations, schools and parent councils, but they're not given the right to vote. Many municipal politicians think that that would help them, because there are so many people where you go and knock on their door and they say, "Oh, sorry. I'm a non-resident. I don't have the right to vote," even though they're paying the same taxes as everybody else. That could have been addressed in this bill; it hasn't been addressed in this bill, and that is a weakness in this bill.

But we would like to hear from the Attorney General at this time, if we could, Speaker.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Welland.

I would like to say to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, on behalf of the Attorney General: Thank you very much for the hint on your lead question tomorrow. We very much appreciate it. I'm sure, at 10:30 tomorrow morning, you'll be able to get an answer to that question, so you'll just have to stay tuned.

I really do appreciate the comments from the member from Welland and her general support of the bill. I share her concerns about polling stations and accessibility plans during elections. This piece of legislation will help to make that better. Is it going to fix it all? No, but it will make it better. I think it's important, if we want to engage people in campaigns, that we make it easy for them to vote and not send them four kilometres down the street or to a place with a set of stairs that has no way for them to get up. I think we have to go to people as well and have some provisions for that.

We're not going to talk about campaign financing as it relates to the question period today, because the Speaker has already told me not to do that, so I'm going to scratch that off the list. But just to clarify, it's a question of registering as a third party, and in those municipalities that don't accept corporate and union donations, corporations and unions can't be third parties.

I do want to add one more comment as to the member not being invited to an announcement. I want to let her know that the members that I know on this side of the House do what they can. I know that when I went to Windsor, I let all the members from Windsor know—

Interjection: No, no. That's not how it happens.

Mr. John Fraser: Let me finish what I'm saying. Don't assume there's a motive or impugn a motive. I'm not saying there never is, but what I'm saying is that often things happen—they happen on this side of the House. I went to the riding of the member from Kingston and the Islands and I didn't let her know. I didn't let the member from Niagara know. It happens. It shouldn't, but please don't attach a motive to it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The member for Welland now has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the members from Kitchener Centre, Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Windsor–Tecumseh, Ottawa South, and even the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his heckling.

Now, I am sure—back to the member from Ottawa South—if we asked a question about that this week, the answer would be the normal "This is a legal issue before the courts, so I am unable to respond." Right?

There was one other issue that I wanted to raise, and I ran out of time: the issue of enforcement-compliant audit committees. There is nothing currently under the act that does anything to support people who run who are wrongly accused of not spending enough for the campaign that they put on.

Recently in the riding beside me, in St. Catharines, in the municipal election, there was a vexatious and frivolous complaint by someone who actually had worked for the Liberal candidate—the Liberal candidate won—and complained voraciously to this committee. There was no substance to the complaint; there were no penalties to the person making the complaints, at the end of the day. But the candidate had to go out and hire a lawyer. It probably cost him $20,000 in legal fees, at the end of the day. There is nothing to prevent people from doing that. Maybe there needs to be some sort of process that actually deals with vexatious and frivolous issues around campaigns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiques, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	Scarborough–Rouge River	

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Grant Crack, Cheri DiNovo
Han Dong, Michael Harris
Sophie Kiwala, Arthur Potts
Todd Smith, Monique Taylor
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Yvan Baker
Laura Albanese, Yvan Baker
Toby Barrett, Han Dong
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Ann Hoggarth, Peter Z. Milczyn
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

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Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Lisa Gretzky, Ann Hoggarth
Harinder Malhi, Jim McDonell
Eleanor McMahon, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Robert Bailey, Wayne Gates
Monte Kwinter, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Randy Hillier, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qaadri
Laurie Scott
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jack MacLaren
Granville Anderson, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Chris Ballard, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Joe Dickson, Jennifer K. French
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Bill Walker
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Marie-France Lalonde, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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