



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Thursday 14 April 2016

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 14 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 416-325-3708.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 416-325-3708.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 14 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 14 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS
ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN
AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When last we discussed the bill, the member for Prince Edward–Hastings had the floor and we were at two minutes. We are now doing further debate. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning on Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts. When this bill was introduced in May 2015, we didn't hear very much about it, but then people started to contact us with their concerns. The concerns were coming from rural Ontario.

We've looked at the bill, and we understand the concerns that people are bringing to us. We don't necessarily agree that the bill brings about the same threats as they may feel, but what really irks me is that the government didn't go through a better consultative process, sitting down with people in rural Ontario, in particular land-owners and snowmobile clubs, to indicate clearly what this bill would and would not do. That's the crux of the problem for me right now in eastern Ontario. The government can say, "It doesn't cause that," but misunderstanding or whatever about the bill has caused people to shut down snowmobile trails throughout eastern Ontario and, in fact, throughout the province because they're not comfortable with what the government is doing here without a proper explanation of just what this bill is intended to do.

We have to go back a little bit to the history of why there is distrust—mistrust I guess would be the word—

from people who populate rural Ontario. If you go back to this government when they got elected, they immediately started to do some things that people threw up their hands and said, "What's this all about?" Church suppers and county fairs were being told they couldn't serve food because they weren't going to pass health regulations—shutting down little things like that or threatening to have the local health units go in and shut down a church supper because they didn't have state-of-the-art sanitation procedures in the basement of St. John's Augsburg church. They just don't have those things. They're not equipped with state-of-the-art food serving equipment.

They had to back off on that because there was such an uproar. But it spoke to the thinking of the government, about how they viewed activities that have gone on for decades, centuries in fact, in rural Ontario, where no one had ever raised an issue that people were going to the church supper and leaving ill. In fact, I think we get more cases of salmonella and food poisoning in city restaurants that don't get up to code than we've ever had at the church supper down in the local parish. But the government felt that they needed to put the pressure on those rural people. There have been various publications that have talked about how this government, more than any government before, would like to see rural Ontario depopulated and force everybody to move to the cities because they really find that supporting rural Ontario has just gotten to be too much of a big deal, too expensive and too cumbersome for them. So why is there distrust out there? It's because of the previous actions of the government.

Let's get to the bill itself. If they wanted to perpetuate that feeling, that's all they need to do: bring in a bill that is not properly consulted, not properly explained. Then those who are naturally, and with good reason, suspicious of the government are going to stand and raise their objections to it.

I know we don't have a lot of time, but the section of the bill that has caused the most consternation is section 12, the section dealing with easements. Before I get too much into it, yesterday I thanked the member for Trinity–Spadina for asking a question about Bill 100 and easements and looking for some clarification around it. I thought it was a golden opportunity for the minister to actually clarify the situation, extend an olive branch of some description to rural Ontario and maybe clearly state that in committee and before we go back for second reading we will put that kind of language in the bill that rural Ontario is looking for that clearly states that any and all easements will and must be voluntary and that no

one can be forced into an easement and verbal agreements cannot ever be made into an easement. Make that clear to the people, and I think you would have given a great deal of comfort to those people in rural Ontario who are concerned about this bill. Sadly, the minister took the opportunity to talk about how great the bill was and that we, on the wrong side of his argument, were just making a lot of noise. That's not how you make the other side feel comfortable that you're trying to get this thing through in a reasonable fashion. He should have answered the question and he should have satisfied the desires and the wants of those who are concerned about the misunderstandings and the bad drafting of this legislation.

What has happened—and I'm hopeful now that winter is finally over, we think—is that the snowmobile trails, whether they were shut down by the landowners that owned the land that they were traversing, are closed anyway because winter is essentially over. Having said that, we've got to make sure that we can give comfort to those landowners so that those trails will be reopened come the fall. Snowmobiling is an integral part of our winter economy. It would be terrible that because of a badly messaged, badly drafted piece of legislation that did not take into account the need to consult properly with all of the requisite parties, we would see a billion-dollar industry in this province cut off at the knees because they can't cross certain properties.

0910

You have to understand that snowmobiling requires the co-operation of those landowners. Those landowners are their greatest partners, but the beneficiaries are all of us: the businesses that exist in rural communities, the hotels, the motels, the gas stations, the restaurants—everybody. Truck dealers: If you've got a \$20,000 or \$15,000 snowmobile, you've got to buy a trailer for it, and you're going to have to have a good truck to pull it with. So, what happens to car dealers across the province without snowmobiling? If you don't own a snowmobile, you don't need that big truck to pull it around halfway across the province so you can get onto a good trail and you get there and you find the sign, "Closed because Michael Coteau didn't talk to us." That's not what we want to see.

You need to clarify this. You need to clarify this absolutely, and without any question or doubt, so that the people in rural Ontario can comfortably say to those good people who operate snowmobiles and contribute so much to our economy and have been wonderful neighbours for all of our lives, "My trails are open for business to you." What we need from Minister Coteau is some clarity that says to everybody that it isn't just about the trails here and there; it's also about the trails through rural Ontario, the snowmobile trails, that mean so much to us.

There are some good components to this bill that I think are positive for rural landowners. For rural landowners there are some positive components to this bill. The increased fines for trespassing: That says to rural landowners, "We want to protect your property in a way that it wasn't protected before." That's good. But we

should be talking about that; we shouldn't be talking about the fact that people are losing access to trails in rural Ontario because the minister didn't do his homework. We should be talking about the good parts of the bill and not wondering if we are going to shut down an industry that, my god, we all depend on. I say to my friend from Peterborough, do we need another industry shut down in this province? The answer is no. So let's stand together. Let's stand together with the people in rural Ontario—the landowners, the snowmobilers—and say: Ontario is open for business and this bill is going to be clarified to make sure that happens.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to address this bill this morning. I hope that when this bill gets to committee the minister will do the right thing and make sure that the attitude that rural Ontario is not respected by this government has a chance—I'll give the government a chance to improve your relationship with rural Ontario. Show them that you respect them and that you're interested in their views.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. If I wasn't awake, I am now.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for that roaring speech on Bill 100. You know, a lot of people have actually been up on their feet to talk about this bill. I think it's clear that the bill is kind of vague in its intent. The bill really was about an easement issue, but in fact the bill in its intent really talks about increasing awareness, encouraging use of, enhancing the trail experience, protecting trails for today's generation and future generations, and recognizing the contribution that trails make to the quality of life in Ontario, when the bill should have been more about the actual private access to trails in the province. There should have been more consultation with those people who own land and actually allow people to connect to snowmobile trails on their property, and unfortunately that wasn't done.

So once again, in this piece of legislation, not enough consultation on the front end, and we know that at the back end there will be an enforcement problem; there always is. We hear about that with every piece of legislation that gets passed here. We continue to put in legislation, but we don't actually put in the appropriate enforcement at the end of the day. So I hope that when the bill gets to committee, we can address not only the amendments we need to make for the people who will allow access easements, but as well the enforcement piece for those people who may be violating pieces of the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. I think you were there when we left yesterday, right? Did you go home?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I like it here.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You like it there. Good.

Speaker, it's a pleasure to make a couple of comments on the comments by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but I must ask first: Where do you get those pills? I just don't have the stamina first thing in the morning. If you could help us, it would be great. I know he was at the lung caucus this morning, and I wonder if it was the breakfast. I know that he ate it pretty quickly.

Speaker, let me focus a little bit on the mechanism for easements that the member talked about. I'm going to read this, because I want to make sure I get it right: "An easement under the proposed act would, if passed, be an agreement between a willing landowner and an eligible body that grants the eligible body access to the owner's land for trail-related activities or purposes."

I think that's fairly clear. The two parties have to come together. If the landowner says, "No, you're not bringing your snowmobile across my land" or "you're not walking across my land, or your four-wheeler," I think that's fairly clear.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: He has to have rights.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They've got to have rights to do that. It's an agreement, and I think we have to respect that.

Speaker, trails have an important function in our economy. Living in rural Ontario in Northumberland county, I know there are a number of trails, and there are some that create some issues like those we are trying to undo here.

I think we need to be somewhat cautious about how we message this—address it. Can we do better? Maybe we could look at that, for sure, through committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I don't think anybody here is terribly surprised to hear that there isn't a lot of snowmobiling in my riding of Thornhill. But it doesn't mean that people don't want to get out into the country and access our fantastic trail system in Ontario.

I have to say that in Montreal I used to go very often on the weekend with my family to the area of Oka. I think that people here have heard of Oka cheese. There's a monastery that started Oka cheese that is so famous. Mostly, it was a national park, but I never thought, when in Montreal doing trails, "Is this private land, or is this some kind of national park?" Montreal has an incredible system.

It doesn't take long to get into the country in Montreal, because it's an island and things are sort of constrained. We do hear a lot about snowmobiling. The reality is that these trails are used for so much more. They're used for biking, hiking and cross-country skiing. I mostly use the trails for cross-country skiing, I have to admit.

We have to understand that people are not going to allow total strangers to come on their land, out of the goodness of their heart, to participate in all kinds of winter or summer sports that may involve heavy machinery or other equipment. They may have emergencies. They have to maintain the trails. They're not going to allow that to happen without absolute assurances they're not giving up something of value: either access to their own

land or providing guaranteed easements in the future or somehow devaluing their own property.

I think the whole reason we're here in the Legislature is to ensure that people's needs are met and that their property is respected. I think that what we are hearing from so many people on this side of the House is that there are concerns with this bill. The government had the opportunity to address the concerns, and for some reason the government chose not to. That makes people very nervous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would say that I agree with lots of what the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had to say. I represent a northern riding. I live on a lake. There are major snowmobile trails right in front of my house. We have the Walden snowmobile club, the Sudbury snowmobile club, the Espanola snowmobile club, the Massey—there are trails all over. Come and use the trails in Nickel Belt. We have beautiful, beautiful Ski-Doo trails, some of them four lanes, two lanes this way and two lanes that way. They're beautiful.

0920

But now some of them are closed, not because of a lack of snow but because of this bill. Some of the snowmobile clubs have written to me and said that some landowners had given permission to go on their lands forever. You see, Speaker, in the summer the farmers don't want you a mile around their field, but in the winter, when there's four feet of snow on top of it, they're quite okay. If you stay within the trails, they let you go. An industry that took a long time to build—and I want a shout-out to my predecessor, Shelley Martel, who was instrumental in making sure that the trail system as we know it in the north was developed—is now at risk of collapsing. You only have to have one piece taken out of the trail and then you're doomed: This entire trail from beginning to end has to close, with everything that comes with it.

The government keeps saying it's not going to happen, but you know what? Perception is reality. The perception of those people is that they will have to now hire a lawyer to make sure that the permission that they give is not going to be detrimental to their farm and to their land. This has to be addressed. It's not to be addressed by telling them that they're wrong; it's by talking to the people of northern Ontario. Try it. It's worth it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from Welland, Northumberland–Quinte West, Thornhill and Nickel Belt for their comments. I must say, the member for Nickel Belt summed it up extremely well. That is how we want to close, as well.

These people didn't start closing trails to snowmobilers because they had a bad dream one night and woke up and decided it would be a good idea to shut the trails. Something came to their attention—across their desk, so to speak—that scared them. It was Bill 100. And regardless of what the government says about how

wonderful Bill 100 is, one of the side effects—the unforeseen circumstances, perhaps—was that landowners believed that this constituted a threat to their property rights. If you feel that it's your responsibility as a government to make sure that communications are clear, then you have to do something to remedy that. Because the consequence is, as the member from Nickel Belt said, that the trails closed, not because of the climate or weather or lack of snow; they closed because people reacted to what they saw in Bill 100.

It only stands to reason, then, that it is incumbent upon the government to satisfy that concern, to the extent that it can be satisfied, and I think it can, if the minister would clarify, when he has the opportunity to do that, that these easements have to be absolutely—without any question—voluntary. You cannot be forced into one; verbal contracts do not constitute easements. All of those things need to be clarified, so that when this bill comes back to the House from committee, should it pass second reading—but the government has the majority; I'm sure that it's going to—that has to be cleared up. We want those trails open next winter. It's vital to us here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Oh, the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Speaker, for noticing me. I appreciate it.

It's great to rise this morning in the House on the Supporting—

Mr. Tim Hudak: You've got to work on your tan.

Mr. Grant Crack: I haven't gone away yet—Supporting Ontario Trails Act, 2015. If it was passed, it would improve and sustain Ontario's urban, suburban, rural and remote land and water trails. It would help the trails community more effectively develop, operate and promote trails while enhancing the trail experience for all trail users.

The proposed act would strengthen Ontario's trails system by enabling the government to:

- (1) better manage trail activity and protect public land and property by modernizing stewardship, compliance and enforcement tools;
- (2) clarify landowner responsibilities for trails running through their land;
- (3) strengthen the consequences of trespassing on private and agricultural land; and
- (4) increase the amount that landowners could recover for damages caused by trespassers.

During second reading debate, we heard members of the opposition and we heard members of the third party expressing their support for Bill 100. I'd like to quote a couple of the members, Speaker. One of them is the really good member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek; perhaps you know him. He said, “The NDP supports the objectives of the bill.... It is good that this bill provides the trails community with improved and expanded tools to develop, operate and promote trails.”

What a great quote. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound said he “will support this bill in principle because of a number of reasons.”

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka said, “I think there are some benefits to this bill, which have been largely overshadowed by the concerns with the easement section.... There's a change in the limit on fines for trespassers on private property. It goes from \$2,000 to \$10,000. That's more protection for private property owners. There's a reduction in liability, and clarification of liability, for landowners. That's also a positive that is in this bill.”

Speaker, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington: “The Liberal government has actually introduced a bill that is beneficial and helps rural Ontario. It promotes and improves property rights in Ontario. This is the first bill I have seen from this Liberal government that actually helps and promotes property rights. I'd like to take a few moments to tell people why. I do understand that it is as if the world had been turned upside down by this Liberal government and Bill 100. People don't know what to make of it.”

Speaker, we allowed, as a government—we enjoyed the number of hours of debate so far. We reached 6.5 hours of debate. And we've had more debate than that. We continue to debate it, and we've seen nearly 10 hours of debate to this point. According to my count, we've had nearly half of the members of this Legislature speak to this bill.

There's been considerable debate on this bill and we've heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. Unfortunately, much of the debate has been repeating points already made by other members. It's clear there's support on all sides for this bill, but members on the other side would like to see some amendments. It's time for this bill to be put to a vote for second reading and hopefully be referred to committee, where the important work takes place.

In committee, that's where members of all parties will hear from stakeholders who have an interest in this bill. Members of the public will be able to provide input into this important bill. In committee, members will have the opportunity to move amendments to strengthen the bill, and this House can move on to debate other matters.

There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process. We have Bill 119, the Health Information Protection Act; Bill 135, the Energy Statute Law Amendment Act; Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act; and Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to spend some time debating some of those other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we can't until Bill 100 is referred to committee for further review. As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who spoke earlier, said, he'd like to see this go to committee. Well, as a result, I would move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to first thank the member for mentioning me in his submission. Thanks so much. It was nice of him to allow us to talk for 10 hours.

Mr. Crack has moved that the question now be put. I'm satisfied that we have a benchmark and I'm satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a "no."

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

This will be voted on after question period.

Vote deferred.

0930

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES SERVICES
FINANCIERS DE RECHANGE

Mr. Orazietti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Orazietti.

Hon. David Orazietti: I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

This is an important piece of legislation. There has been much discussion about this. From the time when the federal government downloaded responsibility for payday loans and other financial services, the province has stepped up with legislation. My colleague and predecessor in this ministry, Minister Ted McMeekin, first introduced the Payday Loans Act in 2008 in our government. Since then, we have been building on the appropriate regulations and legislative requirements that help to protect vulnerable consumers in the province of Ontario.

I want to make a couple of introductory comments first, before I get into the key issues of the legislation. Back to the point that I was making, there has been considerable commentary on this in various media outlets across the province, in Windsor and Hamilton and Ottawa, and here in Toronto as well. I have spoken to a number of councillors in the province with respect to this issue, including Matthew Green in Hamilton, who has been active on this issue. I know there are other councillors that my staff have also spoken with who want to see better regulations to support vulnerable consumers in their respective communities.

I can also say that with respect to our ministry, our data show that complaints with respect to alternative financial services—payday lending and the like—have been the number one complaint or inquiry in our ministry. In some years, that's meant well over a thousand calls or complaints with respect to this particular issue. So it is an issue that has significant concern in Ontario, an issue that Ontarians do want addressed.

There are over 800 licensed payday lenders in the province of Ontario today. With respect to this piece of legislation, approximately a thousand Ontarians were consulted in the development of it. As well, obviously, all Ontarians have an opportunity to provide input into legislation that's being made by the province. Our consultations took us to Hamilton, to Owen Sound, to Guelph, to Ottawa, to Windsor. So this has not been a piece of legislation that has been developed in isolation or in a bubble, so to speak. It has been one that has been sounded well with communities across the province and with many different stakeholders.

I'm going to make some comments with respect to the bill and the importance of passing this legislation. The bill aims to better protect financially insecure Ontarians with limited access to traditional credit by amending legislation to protect consumers who use financial services other than banks and credit unions. If passed, this legislation would also protect consumers with debts in collection. Financial security is a broad issue that our government is addressing in partnership with all levels of government, community agencies and the private sector.

Ontario has had a long history of protecting consumers in debt and those who use alternative financial services. The Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act sets rules for when and how collection agencies can contact consumers with debts in collection. The Consumer Protection Act sets rules for credit agreements and leasing. And the Payday Loans Act capped the cost of borrowing and protected payday loan borrowers from certain practices.

Consumers who use these services and consumers with debts in collection are part of a broad spectrum. They may be employed full-time or they may be on a fixed income. They may be newcomers to Ontario or have lived in Ontario all of their lives. They may be facing financial difficulties for the first time or have been in debt for many years.

Speaker, what consumers of alternative financial services and those with debts in collection have in common is limited financial assets, incomes that can fall short of expenses and few options for credit. We have heard from a wide range of stakeholders that alternative financial services are an important source of credit during emergencies to avoid a bounced cheque, a late payment or an overdraft charge. However, these services also come with a high price, and that cost can become a new financial burden for some consumers.

It's our responsibility to ensure that the options for financially vulnerable consumers help to break the cycle of debt. Our government is proud of the fact that legislation is in place to protect these consumers, yet we all know that today's marketplace is innovative and constantly changing. As new alternative financial services slowly enter the market, we must be vigilant and respond to those changes. We must make sure that consumers have the information and resources they need to make the right decision for themselves.

It was also important to ask consumers and other stakeholders what they thought, and so we did. We con-

sulted with a payday lending panel, which provided advice on how to improve payday loans. I have already referenced, Speaker, the locations that we have travelled to in the province to undertake these consultations. We wanted to ensure that the ever-changing alternative financial services market can be addressed and, as well, the importance of debt collection more generally.

We responded by developing broader proposals to strengthen consumer financial protection in the province. We consulted with consumers, community agencies, consumer advocates, the debt collection industry and the alternative financial services industry. When Ontarians tell us there are areas we can improve on, it's imperative that we take steps to do so.

Today our government is focused on the path forward. The legislation before the House for second reading today, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, proposes to help consumers using alternative financial services and consumers with debts in collection. If passed, it will strengthen protections in order to address a wide range of alternative financial services and debt collection issues.

With regard to cheque cashing services, alternative financial service providers typically cash cheques for a flat fee of \$3 plus 3% of the face value of the cheque. With repeat use, this quickly adds up and can eat away at a family's bottom line. Our proposed law would ensure that consumers are given the information they need when cashing government cheques. It would also allow for limits to be set on the cost of cashing a government-issued cheque. This would help ensure that recipients of government-issued cheques receive the intended value.

With respect to rent-to-own services, we are also proposing improvements to the rules surrounding rent-to-own services in Ontario. Consumers are likely to choose rent-to-own when they cannot afford to purchase the product outright and have limited options to borrow the funds. Through these services, customers can rent furniture, electronics and appliances and, at some point in the agreement, purchase them outright. Short term, the weekly or monthly payments appear low, but long term, consumers typically pay far more for the item than if they would have purchased it outright.

If passed, this legislation would enable further protection of consumers by providing that important information about rent-to-own services to potential customers, giving customers a grace period for late payments, and establishing consumer rights to reinstate a terminated lease agreement and thereby avoid additional penalties. Changes such as these would make us leaders in Canada when it comes to protecting consumers using rent-to-own services.

With regard to instalment loans, we're proposing to improve regulations surrounding credit agreements by addressing potential risks to consumers using high-cost instalment loans. Instalment loans are any loan that has a set number of scheduled payments. High-cost instalment loans typically offered by alternative financial service providers have grown in use in recent years. According

to a large bankruptcy trustee, the number of insolvencies involving these instalment loans grew five times in just two years.

0940

Speaker, when we consulted, we heard that consumers can find the cost of these loans confusing and unexpectedly expensive, and that some consumers are offered services that they don't need and pressured into borrowing again and again. With this legislation, we are proposing to allow for rules to address these issues.

First, the bill would allow us to require the lender to assess if the borrower can afford the loan, and share that assessment with the borrower. Consumers need to know how that loan will affect their financial situation.

Second, if passed, this bill would allow for the control over the cost of fees not included in the cost of borrowing, such as optional insurance which can be very costly to a consumer.

Third, we are proposing to prevent lenders from contacting consumers for the purpose of offering to refinance those same loans. Refinancing an instalment loan can keep consumers in debt longer. Ontario's consumers deserve the opportunity to consider whether or not they want or need to refinance a loan themselves. These proposed changes will better protect Ontarians in the growing high-cost loan instalment market.

Speaker, with regard to debt collection services, Ontario is proud to have strong rules in place for consumers who have debts that have progressed to collection. We propose to make existing rules for debt collection even stronger. The practices of debt-collection agencies account for the highest number of telephone calls and inquiries received by Consumer Protection Ontario. We're proposing to expand existing rules against unfair and harmful collection practices and have them apply to collection agencies and creditors that have purchased overdue debts. We would also allow for a requirement that more information be provided to consumers as part of the collection process.

These are just a few ways in which Bill 156 would help vulnerable individuals and families in Ontario. Our actions would protect consumers from financial harm and would help ensure they receive better information and guidance so they can make informed decisions. If passed, this legislation would protect consumers from both abusive debt-collection practices and unlicensed lenders in the payday loan industry.

With regard to payday loans, Speaker: This brings us to a topic that led to our broader review of strengthening consumer financial protection, specifically payday loans. When we introduced the Payday Loans Act in 2008, we did so to protect Ontarians using these services. We set rules to inform borrowers, to prohibit payday loans from being rolled over, and to limit the cost of a payday loan. Since the act took effect in 2009, we have taken enforcement action to correct non-compliance and have monitored the payday loan lending market. We know we can do more.

Speaker, payday lending is a widely used service. In Ontario in 2014, approximately 400,000 households used

a payday loan. This is three times the number using payday loans as compared to 2009, and the typical payday loan borrower uses the service repeatedly. The average payday loan user in Ontario enters into about eight agreements a year with an average loan size of approximately \$460. That means that the average payday loan user ends up paying approximately \$770 in costs per year.

We know that payday loan borrowers tend to have lower incomes and are likely to be more financially insecure. Despite clearly displayed costs and the common practice of repeat borrowing, only one third of borrowers of payday loans know that their payday loan is the most expensive way to borrow money. In fact, less than 10% of consumers understand exactly how expensive payday loans are, so we're taking action to ensure Ontario's payday loan users are better informed and better protected.

Speaker, the law before us today would, if passed, enhance Ontario's already strong Payday Loans Act. For example, once a payday loan is paid back, payday lenders would need to wait a week before they entered into a new payday loan agreement with the borrower. This would give borrowers some time to determine whether or not there are less expensive options available to them.

We're also proposing to strengthen protection for repeat borrowers. We would do this by allowing rules to be made that would give certain repeat borrowers more time to repay their debts.

It's clear that payday borrowers would benefit from having more information about available options. For this reason, we are proposing rules that would help consumers learn about various credit counselling services. We also propose expanded rules on the type of information that would be required to be provided to borrowers and how this information is given to them.

In addition, we would strengthen our ability to enforce the act by allowing inspections of unlicensed lenders and loan brokers. The purpose of the Payday Loans Act is to protect borrowers, and we want to make sure that we have the tools in place to do so.

Speaker, we have much to be proud of when it comes to protecting consumers in the marketplace. We now have an opportunity and an obligation to do more.

We've consulted with businesses, consumers and community agencies. We have sought the expertise of other jurisdictions across the country, the continent and overseas.

We understand that alternative financial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other services or options for some borrowers. We know that partners outside of government, such as traditional financial institutions and community agencies, are working hard to provide other options, and we applaud their work.

Addressing the broader issues of financial security is a complex task, and it takes time. But we have the opportunity to strengthen protections for financially insecure consumers now. Our responsibility is to protect those who depend on financial services that fall outside mainstream banks and credit unions.

Speaker, I know how important this issue is to many people who have contacted our ministry and to people who raised this issue with me in my riding. I know how important this is to members of this Legislature who have come to me on this particular issue. Many consumers, vulnerable consumers in particular, and community agencies have raised this issue with their MPPs. This is clearly not a partisan issue. I know that we all want to ensure that vulnerable consumers in Ontario have the protection that they need, regardless of where they live. I hope all members of the Legislature will strongly support this legislation and help to move it forward.

We know that the traditional form of lending and borrowing in this province is difficult to access, especially for vulnerable and needy consumers. We know that the industry continues to evolve and continues to invent new products, new criteria and new ways to capture additional profits in their sector while providing a service. Some community organizations and community activist groups have said that this particular sector is important to regulate. But it is also important that we understand that there needs to be available credit provided to individuals in emergency circumstances and in emergency situations when someone needs, for example, to get some money for, perhaps, a prescription for their child. We know that there are these types of situations out there.

We have a few choices. We could say that we would completely ban payday lending in the province of Ontario, and the implications of doing that would be that certain individuals would not have access to credit that they needed.

We can look at a more prudent, and I believe a more practical, approach to this, which is to ensure that the rules and the environment that are in place in Ontario help to protect vulnerable consumers and create an environment where people are being informed, where they have the information they need and they know what they're getting into when they borrow from a payday lender in the province. That gives people the best information and the best protection they possibly can have.

0950

I believe in the legislation that we're moving forward because it will take steps to help protect vulnerable consumers. I'm looking forward to the discussions at committee and I'm looking forward to hearing the feedback from members in the Legislature on this particular issue.

I've had several conversations with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing with regard to the locations of payday lending stores and the clustering of these stores in municipalities. I know that municipal councillors are concerned with the location of the stores, the clustering, as well, and, under the Municipal Act, about whether or not there can be provisions made to limit the distances by where they are located. There are other examples of other types of businesses in this province that need to comply with those types of rules.

So I am supportive of that and I am supportive of the work that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is doing in that regard. I am sensitive to the concerns of

municipalities when they are talking about ensuring that they have the tools that they need to help protect consumers and to look at ways in which the location and the density of these particular retail outlets are placed in communities.

We know in other provinces they're having the same discussion around this issue. This is not an issue that is easily solved. We're talking about individuals who are often in significant need, who are vulnerable and who have challenges with respect to credit and may have in some cases limited knowledge and understanding of the environment that they're getting into when they take up a payday loan.

Again, I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to move this legislation forward with second reading. I'm looking forward to hearing the comments from my colleagues. I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague the parliamentary assistant and the MPP for Newmarket–Aurora, who is very concerned about this issue as well and who is a strong advocate for vulnerable consumers in his riding, and we'll continue the debate. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: As we heard today, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services has introduced second reading of Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016. As the minister indicated, alternative financial services include an array of financial services offered outside of traditional banks and credit unions. They include payday loans, cheque cashing and rent-to-own services.

This important law proposes to amend existing legislation to protect consumers who use alternative financial services providers; that is, providers other than banks and credit unions. We have consulted widely before bringing forward the legislation before you today. We spoke with community agencies, consumer advocates, credit counsellors, debt collectors, municipalities, credit unions, the banking sector, the alternative financial services sector, including payday loan lenders, the financial services industry and consumers.

From those consultations, we know that some people do not have access to a lower-cost source of credit when they have urgent financial obligations, when their income falls short of expenses or they have limited financial assets. We also know that they need to have access to these alternative financial services so they can meet their urgent obligations. These urgent financial obligations include paying the rent, paying bills, buying groceries and paying for unexpected expenses such as car repairs. We also heard alternative sources of credit can be harmful to consumers by putting them further into a cycle of debt and financial hardship.

We explored further. We established a panel with representatives from community agencies, consumer advocates, credit counsellors and the payday loans industry. The panel did its own extensive research before recommending a number of ways to strengthen payday lending

in Ontario. Their findings and recommendations were posted on the Regulatory Registry for the public to share their views on payday loans. The message to the government was clear. That message was that the government can do more to protect users of alternative financial services, and specifically users of payday loans.

The ministry also held focus groups with payday loan users that year. Many borrowers considered borrowing from family, accessing loans or tapping their credit card before choosing to use payday loans. They told us they chose payday loans because at the end of the day, these loans were easy and available. They are also an important source of credit for many people in this province. In the absence of access to lower-cost credit, they want to see payday loans continue to be made available in the marketplace, and they asked us to consider changes that would strengthen the protections that already exist for payday loans in our province.

Some of the things people asked us to consider are longer terms and lower costs, a reduced cost of repaying the loan earlier, and the option to pay back loans in instalments.

We explored this further. We wanted to make sure that we got it right. Last year, ministry staff visited six communities across Ontario. They spoke with municipalities, agencies and consumers on topics including rent-to-own, instalment loans, payday loans, cheque-cashing, remittances, and debt-collection practices.

During these discussions, payday loans emerged as a popular focus of conversation. Stakeholders told us that stricter regulations were needed for payday loans and rent-to-own services.

Mr. Speaker, it became clear to us that the marketplace for alternative financial services is changing and that those in the marketplace and those using the services had expectations they wanted us to meet.

Our government decided that it was important to expand the scope of our new proposed legislation. Strengthened protections for payday loan users are an important part of this new proposed law.

But we propose to include the broader alternative financial services marketplace. The proposed law includes provisions related to cashing of government cheques, rent-to-own services, instalment loans and protection of consumers who have debts in collections. Ontarians should have choice when it comes to their finances, and that includes the opportunity to access credit and other financial services.

Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the people of this province. We have sought the expertise of other jurisdictions across the country, continent and overseas. We are making an ongoing effort to explore all of the options available to us to strengthen protections for consumers from the risks of using alternative financial services.

In speaking with consumers and the industry, it is clear that alternative financial services can be an important way for many people in our province to meet their financial obligations in the absence of low-cost alternatives to short-term credit. We understand that alternative finan-

cial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other options.

We know that partners outside of government, such as traditional financial institutions and community agencies, are working hard to provide other options, and we applaud their work.

We are also working with municipalities across Ontario. We know some municipalities are taking steps to limit the number and regulate the locations of payday loan and cheque-cashing outlets in their communities. In community meetings and consultation feedback, we heard concerns about how high concentrations of payday lenders affect local neighbourhoods. We heard the desire for more control of where payday lenders operate, in order to address community-level impacts. We're working with our municipal partners at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to explore how we can work together to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, we have much to be proud of when it comes to protecting consumers in the marketplace. We have taken the time to listen to the people of our province. We have consulted businesses, consumers and other interested parties such as community agencies. We have done our due diligence.

1000

We understand that alternative financial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other options. Our goal is to take every opportunity we can to strengthen protections for financially insecure consumers. To build a stronger foundation of consumer protection for the people in our province, Mr. Speaker and honourable colleagues, I invite you to support our Minister of Government and Consumer Services as we work to give people in our province the stronger protection they have asked for and they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, just to carry on and to provide a bit more background: As we said, there is a bit of historical context to the second reading of this bill. As the minister noted earlier, our government is committed to protecting consumers. That includes protecting Ontarians from a cycle of debt. In fact, in 2013, the ministry committed to review the payday loan legislation. That review was expanded to include other types of high-cost alternative financial services, such as instalment loans, cheque cashing and rent-to-own services, as well as debt collection. Broader public consultation informed our approach to strengthening protections for consumers of alternative financial services and those who are struggling with debt.

The proposed bill would protect consumers in several important ways. We've heard the minister outline a number of them, and I've touched on a number of them myself.

Consumers with debt in collections would benefit from debt collection rules that apply more broadly, including applying them to debt purchasers. Consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. Consumers using rent-to-own services would benefit

from a grace period for late payment and a right to reinstate the agreement under certain circumstances. Consumers using instalment loans would benefit from cost control of certain fees, such as optional insurance. Consumers of payday loans would have to wait seven days between payday loans, giving them more time to consider their options. Finally, before I wrap up, those who borrow repeatedly would have a longer repayment period in certain circumstances.

Again, I would urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill, Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015, as we move it through the House. I thank you for your time and attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? Questions and comments? No questions and comments.

Back to either the minister or the member for a two-minute response.

Further debate, then, if there are no questions and comments. Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm just waiting for it to go around.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Too late. You missed the boat. Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour to get up and speak to Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services. This bill was first introduced back in December of 2015, so apparently it wasn't too important to the government, because it has taken months to actually bring it back.

Anyway, the bill amends the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act, the Consumer Protection Act and the Payday Loans Act and expands the regulation-making powers in each act. There are some significant amendments.

Now, I know that particularly the payday loan issue is a huge problem in many of our communities. We have constituents who come into our office day in and day out who complain about the fact that they perhaps can't open an account at a bank or at a credit union because either they don't have identification, they don't have an address or they just can't afford to have a bank account, because in some of the banks you need to pay as much as \$25 a month. Potentially, the lowest bank account is \$7.50 to \$10 a month.

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: The whip brought something to my attention that I should—Mr. Speaker, I'm going to stand down the lead for the caucus.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I heard you. The member from Welland has asked to stand down the lead. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Further debate? The member from Welland again.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker.

I was speaking about the fact that there are many people who live in poverty in our communities who don't

have the ability to open a bank account or open an account at a credit union. Even at credit unions, although you don't necessarily pay a fee for banking in some situations, you have to have shares in that credit union and you have to come up with some form of money to be able to do that. Certainly in banks there are considerable banking fees that some people just can't afford to pay. Lots of times, it's because they're homeless. They don't have a permanent address; they're perhaps living in a shelter. So when these people are on ODSP or Ontario Works and get their cheques, their only option is to go to one of these payday loan companies to get their cheque cashed. Then they get sucked into that system because they don't have enough money to live.

Somebody on Ontario Works who is single is getting just over \$600 a month. The average rent, for example, in my community is probably \$700 or \$800 a month. Here in the city of Toronto, it can be as much as \$1,200 to \$1,800 a month. So for people who are living on the edge like that, their only option is to go and perhaps borrow money from payday lenders. So then they get into that vortex where they end up paying more than they're even getting from Ontario Works or from, perhaps, some minimum wage employment that they have.

The bill also speaks to amending the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act. The bill amends the act to permit administrative penalties to be imposed against a person who has contravened or is contravening a prescribed provision of the act. It establishes rules respecting the making of an order imposing an administrative penalty, the appeal of such orders, the enforcement of such orders and related matters.

I can tell you that over the last five years I've had a number of people who have come into my office, who have entered into agreements with these debt settlement offices. We have a number of them in my riding. At the end of the day, you could end up paying as much as—I remember one particular constituent. It was \$1,500 or \$1,600 that they were trying to consolidate debt on. They paid a huge fee to the debt consolidation office and, at the end of the day, they didn't get any results. Here are people who are in financial difficulty already, to start with, trying to consolidate some debts so they don't have to claim bankruptcy, who end up paying huge fees to the people who work in the debt consolidation agencies who don't get them any positive outcomes.

I think there needs to be something done in that regard as well, as to how much fees they can charge, so that people who are trying to be upstanding citizens in our communities, who perhaps find themselves unable to pay their bills through no fault of their own, because they've been off sick from work and they don't have any sick pay, or they've been injured and they are waiting for their compensation to come through—there has to be some clearer rules around the fees and how that can address the needs of constituents in our ridings.

1010

The third part of the act is consumer protection. The bill adds a new part to that bill regarding the cashing of

government cheques. The new part provides for a limit on the fee that may be imposed for cashing that government cheque. A supplier who cashes a government cheque for a consumer must also provide the consumer with a statement setting out prescribed information with respect to the cashing of the cheque. I spoke about that briefly, about the fact that many people can't open bank accounts.

I think that we should, in some way, try and address the fact that if people have government cheques, they should be able to cash them at a bank. They should be able to cash them at a credit union. I don't see this necessarily being addressed in this particular bill. Hopefully, when we get to committee, there will be some way to put forward an amendment that will actually deal with that.

We hear about this issue a lot. I know the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton actually talks about this quite often when we're here in the Legislature. I know that many new immigrants, perhaps refugees who are settling in this country, get sucked into this system of actually going to these payday loan companies. At the end of the day, they have less money in their pocket to support their families, but they find that that's the only option that they have.

I've even had people in my own family who have found themselves in hard times, people who perhaps don't want to go to their family and let them know that they're having financial problems. Instead of doing that, they'll go off and enter into some kind of relationship with these agencies. At the end of the day, they find themselves in worse financial shape than they were to start with.

The bill looks like it's got a fair number of amendments. Under the payday loan section, it looks like the bill will amend the restrictions respecting concurrent or replacement payday loan agreements, and respecting the making of more than one payday loan between the same borrower and different lenders.

The bill will also permit the registrar to conduct inspections if he or she has reasonable grounds to believe that a person or an entity is acting as a lender or a loan broker while not licensed. I'm sure that there are agencies out there that aren't licensed. I know that there is probably no enforcement, or very limited enforcement, with respect to these particular financial institutions.

There certainly needs to be more. Regardless of the amendments that get made, and I talked about this on the bill we were discussing earlier today, there needs to be enforcement, right? At the end of the day, we can put in as much legislation as we want, but if we're not enforcing that legislation, then it is problematic.

We know that in many areas of government where we have legislation—I'll take the Employment Standards Act, for example, Speaker, because that's my critic area. We hear from thousands of people each year that the Employment Standards Act isn't enforced, so people aren't getting their regular pay, let alone their overtime pay. They're perhaps not being paid for statutory holidays that they are entitled to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks to the member from Welland. It's 10:15 and this will continue at another time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: First, I want to welcome my friend from my constituency of Thornhill, Willem Hart, who is here today. He had breakfast with me and the mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai, who unfortunately had to leave.

There are many people here from the Yad Vashem foundation, and we're going to be having statements on that later on.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In the members' east gallery today, I'd like to welcome Peter and Elizabeth Peeters, who won an auction in the riding of Peterborough to have a lunch with their MPP.

I would also like to announce today, Mr. Speaker, that a former member of my staff, Stewart, and his wife Jessica just welcomed their first baby, Bryce Andrew Skinner, into the world. We want to give them congratulations.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to introduce champions of demonstration schools Julie Clarke, Cody Clarke, Janet Marriage, Carissa Macaulay, Wendy Haggitt, Dean Ducharme and Tressa Ducharme. They made the trek from Huron county today, and I welcome them.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to welcome the mother of page captain Joshua Kim. Tina Chan-Kim is in the east members' gallery.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to welcome some residents from the city of Ottawa who are here today in support of demonstration schools: Stephanie Grenon, Kevin Van Dyk, Jennifer Pike, Lila-Rosa Prankie, Liz Rosamond and Tyler Cunningham. I welcome them to Queen's Park, and I'm so sorry they had to come here from five hours away.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome two guests of mine from Scarborough–Agincourt: page captain Aarbi Krishnakumar's mother, Sandy, as well as her brother, Mandaran. They are here in the east gallery.

I also want to welcome my constituents from Scarborough–Agincourt who are sitting in the west visitors' gallery: Denis Lanoue and his wife. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to welcome to the Legislature today Ruth and Patrick Bourachot from my riding. They are here representing their son Nathaniel. The issue, of course, is provincial and demonstration schools.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us here today in the east members' gallery is Tim West, a former TIAO mem-

ber and one of the early supporters of Bill 100. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am pleased to be able to introduce Ann and Harold Wall, constituents of mine who are here to show their concern over the direction this government is taking—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me: Introductions only, please.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is my pleasure to welcome community leader Sarbjit Deol. Along with him is a religious leader from India, Baba Lakha Singh, who is the chairman of Vishav Dharm Sewa Shanti Mission; Rakshpal Singh Sangha; Dharminder Singh; Kulwinder Toor; and Paramjit Deol. They are in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you, and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly, constituents from my riding in Leeds–Grenville who have children at the Sagonaska school in Belleville: Sherry Convery, Lesley and Michael Lehman, and Kortney Jensen. I'd ask the members to give them our traditional warm welcome here in the Legislature.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to welcome families, education workers and community supporters from across Ontario who are here today in order to be here for my debate over the motion to save the provincial and demonstration schools.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with a group. I'd like to introduce and welcome the Diller Teen Fellows from Eilat, Israel, to the House today. These teens are visiting Toronto as part of an international leadership program in partnership with the Toronto Jewish community, and I welcome them here to Queen's Park.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce, from the township of Cavan Monaghan, Scott McFadden, Yvette Hurley and Brigid Ayotte. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to introduce Carrie Helmer. Her daughter Katie Helmer attends the Amethyst Demonstration School, and they're here today at Queen's Park.

Hon. David Zimmer: I would like to introduce guests from the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario: Ping Wu, president; Jim Chisholm, vice-president; Martin Haalstra, board director; George Collins, board director; Hiona Murray, labour relations officer; and Howard Brown, their consultant.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome from my riding Jill, Alex and Evan Grant; Lynn, Raymond, April and Thomas Desormeaux; Laurie, Peter and James Forrester; and Dr. Diane, Martin, Chris and Micheal Poilly. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: On behalf of the Legislature, I would like to wish a happy birthday to Sophie Kiwala, who turned 28 on April 10.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome those from my constituency here for the demonstration today, but I also

just noticed that Martin Haalstra is here, a constituent of mine and an engineer. Thanks for coming in.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome the members from Sarnia–Lambton that are here with the demonstration schools today as well.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would also like to welcome all of our special guests here from Sagonaska, which of course is the demonstration school in Belleville, and those with an interest in Sir James Whitney School in Belleville as well. We welcome them all to the Legislature here today.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I understand that today, in the House, we have some members from Glenburnie School in Oakville. Please give them a warm Queen's Park welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today we have in the Speaker's gallery the new consul general of Malta in Toronto, Ms. Hanan El Khatib, and joining the consul general is Ms. Karen Zahra, the administrative officer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Just before we start question period, another note—please bear with me. The rules that were changed with regard to introductions—I want to be clear. I try not to be heavy-handed when it comes to introducing our guests. Two things have happened lately that kind of elicit from me that I have to start being either tougher on the time or tougher on the introductions. It's a time for introducing people. To give a speech or to make some kind of statement beyond that, there's another place for that in the House. The introductions are set there by your rules to simply introduce our guests.

I would appreciate it very much if you did not take advantage of that in any other way, either by stretching things out or making some kind of editorial comment. Please, just introduce our guests, because we want them here, and nine times out of 10 we know why they're here. There's another place for that to be done in this House, and I appreciate your indulgence and your co-operation in that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I have heard story after story from students and parents that have been positively impacted by Ontario's demonstration and provincial schools. Just look at each and every family here today: They represent the countless success stories and soon-to-be success stories. Blind, deaf and learning-disabled students are able to flourish because of these schools. I have heard a student say that the demonstration school actually saved their life.

This government can't play games with the education of these children. My question is very direct, very straightforward to the Premier: Will you commit to keeping the Ontario provincial demonstration schools open for years to come?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome all of the parents and the families here today. It's very important that we have this conversation and you're very welcome. Thank you for coming to the Legislature.

Our government is committed to the success and well-being of every child in this province. We're committed to giving every child access to the programming that they need. I know that there have been successes in the programming in the provincial and demonstration schools. One of the challenges that we have is that there are children who are not in the provincial and demonstration schools who actually need access to programming such as is in the provincial and demonstration schools. So we launched consultations to better understand how students currently attending the provincial and demonstration schools are being supported. I know the Minister of Education will have more to say about that process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier: This morning, the people of Ontario got to meet Lexi. I had the chance to speak with 10-year-old Lexi a couple of weeks ago at my constituency office in Belleville, and let me tell you, this is one intelligent girl who is as cute as a button. When we sat in my office, she had prepared text that she read for me. It was in a large font and spaced out, and she did extremely well. But when I asked her to read something that I had on my desk that was in a 12-point font, Lexi struggled and actually broke down in tears. That's completely unacceptable that that should happen. She deserves a future just like other kids do. She wants to go to Sagonaska next year, like her brother did, and have the future that her brother now has. But there are kids like Lexi in every county and every city right across Ontario.

My question to the Premier is simple: Why does she think it's acceptable to put the education of students with severe learning disabilities in year-to-year chaos, when it would be unacceptable for any other student?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I, too, would like to welcome all of the families that are here today from both the demonstration schools and the provincial schools around the province.

I want to respond to the member by saying that we get it. The demonstration schools provide a wonderful program. The demonstration schools provide a very effective program. But what you're reporting, which is that here is a child who needs the programming—there are thousands of children around Ontario who need the programming, and we need to figure out how—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If you're going to start taking advantage of it, I'm going to start calling it.

Answer?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We need to figure out how we can deliver programming to kids all over the province who can't read, because we want all the—

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

Final supplementary. The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Marie Desrosier lives in North Bay, and her daughter Amanda is enrolled at the Sagonaska Demonstration School. She wrote to our leader, "Without these schools, students like my daughter would not be employable because they would never make it through high school. My daughter is 15 years old and was reading at a grade one level in September of this school year. Today, after six months at Sagonaska, she's reading at a grade three level, with hopes of reaching age-level reading within another year." She continued: "The closure of these schools will mean that these students will never reach their full potential."

Will the Premier stand here today and promise Marie Desrosier that these schools will remain open in the years ahead so that her daughter will have the opportunity to graduate high school?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, and just to be clear, I want everyone to be aware that the application process for the demonstration schools and the enrolment in the provincial schools for the deaf will be continuing. Those processes are starting up again for the 2016-17 year. So for any of the students who are currently enrolled at a demonstration school and are in year one of the program, and who the school says require a second year, then those children would be able to complete that second year. It's the principals who actually designate whether the students should go for one year or whether they need to continue for a second year. But for those students who are in the first year of a program and the principal recommends they continue in the second year, they will be able to do that.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. Parents from my riding with children at Belleville's Sagonaska Demonstration School are among the hundreds here today. They've been spared for one year, but their fight isn't over. They've fought too hard to maintain these life-changing programs to risk what might happen after this year. As one mom in my riding told me, "This school will not just educate my child, but will change the trajectory of his life." If the government was truly listening to these parents like her, they'd stop trying to close these schools and work to put more kids in them.

Speaker, will the Premier guarantee that these schools will be open after the 2016-17 year, and will she assure the parents with us today that the families won't be put through this again next year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the Minister of Education has said, there was a consultation to better understand how students who are currently attending the provincial and demonstration schools can best be supported and, beyond that, to determine how we can support these

kids and their families and how we can support the thousands of kids and their families—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —how we can provide access to programs that are much needed for the thousands of kids and families who don't have access at this point. Surely that is a point that we can agree on: that of course the kids and the families who are here are extremely important, but there are thousands of kids outside of these schools who also need support. That's what we need to determine: How do we, as a society, provide access to all of the kids who need the programs?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: My constituent Ruth Bourachot's son, Nathaniel, struggles with learning disabilities. Last fall, Nathaniel was accepted to the Trillium Demonstration School in Milton. Ruth tells me he entered grade 7 this year with zero ability to read. Today he has now surpassed kindergarten reading and is moving to grade 3 reading. Ms. Bourachot states that her son's success at Trillium is incredible, and I agree.

Ms. Bourachot told the Toronto Star yesterday, "They can open the applications and close the door again. They haven't told the teachers they'll have their jobs back in September; they haven't told the counsellors and support [staff] they'll have their jobs back in September."

Will the Premier please explain to educators why these issues remain unanswered and why she's leaving such uncertainty out there? Have a heart; clean it up today.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Education is going to want to speak to the logistics around staffing, but I just want to be perfectly clear. I understand how important these programs are to the children and the families who are here today, but it is our responsibility to make sure that we don't stand in the way of a change that could actually provide more service and more programming to children across the province.

If the member opposite is asking me: Will we never change those opportunities? Will we stand in the way of other kids getting the program that they need?—no. I won't commit to that. I believe that the education system has to continue to evolve.

My hope for this consultation was—and I said this to the Minister of Education before it started—that we'd be able to work with the families who have these programs and with the families outside of the programs to figure out how we can solve the problem for the kids who do not have access to this program.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary. The member from Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier: Your government is failing students and families who rely on your province's demonstration schools.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Schools like Robarts and Amethyst give young people opportunities to build their skills, confidence and hope so that they can look ahead optimistically to the future.

In a meeting just last Friday with families from my riding, I learned of a young lady who so honestly said that when she's sitting in a classroom full of classmates, knowing that she learns differently, she never feels more alone. Premier, that's not the inclusion these young people deserve. This young lady wants to learn amongst her peers.

Despite the short-term solution that we heard the minister announce yesterday, the Liberals have done nothing to help families plan for long term. We need to hear from the Premier today. Will she commit to all of the families from Huron and across Ontario today that she'll remove the cap and keep the—

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I just want to clarify the situation. The formal consultation process ended on April 8. I'm actually still having some meetings with various parties, so we haven't made any decisions yet in terms of how we provide programming in the future. As the Premier has noted, we want to find a way that will provide good, solid programming of the nature provided in the demonstration schools in a variety of locations, but we haven't made any decisions about how we do that.

But what I can assure you is that we didn't just notify the media of the decision. Before we did that yesterday, we notified the unions, we notified the principals, we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand; you sit.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to speak. I stand; you sit.

New question.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. For months, families and students with exceptional learning needs have pleaded with this government to keep their schools open. They've organized, they've gathered thousands of signatures and they've rallied from Belleville to London. Today, hundreds of families from across the province join us here at Queen's Park, united for one reason and one reason only: the future of our provincial and demonstration schools.

It boggles the mind to think that this Premier doesn't see the value in schools that help some of our most vulnerable children. It all comes down to priorities. Children should always be our priority, Speaker. They should always be our priority.

Will this Premier listen to families and commit to keeping these schools open long-term, or will she turn her back on our most vulnerable children?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, our priority is actually all the children in this province. It is absolutely fundamental that we provide the programming that kids need, the supports that they need, which is why we value the programming in the provincial and demonstration schools. We know that there are aspects of those programs that are very, very successful, and we want to make sure as we go through this process that we provide opportunities for the thousands of kids and the thousands of families who don't have access to those programs, that we provide those opportunities so that every child in the province gets the opportunity that they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has the final word when it comes to prioritization of what this government sees as important, and I guess vulnerable children just don't check the boxes for the Premier when it comes to priorities. Families should not be forced to fight for the opportunity for their children to thrive—

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Provincial schools for the deaf allow students to be immersed in an ASL or LSQ environment, essential for individual expression. Demonstration schools boost reading comprehension and competence for students with exceptional learning needs.

Will this Premier confirm that her government has no plans to close any provincial or demonstration school in this year or next year or in the long term?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I cannot in good conscience say that we will never change anything about the delivery of programming in education, which is exactly what the leader of the third party and the Leader of the Opposition are asking.

I cannot in good conscience say that as we see changes in society, as we see changes in health—I know that there's a huge debate about the programming for deaf and deaf-blind children and the availability of ASL and LSQ in our schools. It's something that I dealt with when I was Minister of Education. A former member here, Gary Malkowski, worked with me so that we could change regulations so that there would be more ASL delivered in our schools.

I understand that there are debates that have to be engaged. One of those debates is, how do we make sure that programming that works for kids has the opportunity to work for all kids in the province who need it?

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Closing enrolment without notice to families and students for these schools was the wrong thing to do. It was a callous and inappropriate move for this government to take. What did this Premier think was going to happen? Of course students and families rallied to try to save the very thing that they need, to make sure that their kids could reach their potential.

For at least a month, New Democrats have been raising this issue in the House, and for a while now, this government has dodged any commitment to actually backtracking on their wrong-headed decision.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So now, here we are: hundreds of people on the lawn of the Legislature this afternoon.

This government has made a commitment to a small change of direction for September, but what all of these families and all of these people need to know is that the change is permanent and they will not close the demonstration and provincial schools in this province.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say that what the leader of the third party is asking is that we determine that it is impossible to provide more programming and more opportunities for the thousands of kids who are not in these schools. What the leader of the third party is saying is, "You can't change. You cannot change the delivery of programs in this province." That's just not reasonable. We have to be able to work with the families.

As I said before, one of the conversations that the Minister of Education and I had was, how do we work with the families to determine what's in the best interests of the kids who are here today and the kids who are in these schools and accessing these programs, but beyond that, what is the solution for the kids who are not in these schools?

The enrolment has been reopened, but final decisions haven't been made. I pray that we'll have the opportunity to work with families to come up with solutions that work for these kids and all of the kids in the province.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. I don't understand why this government thinks that they need to rob Peter to pay Paul. It seems that they do that on every single file, and it's the wrong thing to do.

It's good to see that the Premier can admit when she's wrong and overturn some of her bad decisions, whether it's backing off on a plan to double drug costs for seniors, lifting the freeze on enrolment at the provincial and

demonstration schools, or backing off on bad regulation changes for child care.

When will the Premier reconsider her undemocratic plan to change election financing laws and open the process to include a non-partisan panel?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I believe that the House leaders are meeting either today or in the very near future to talk about what the committee process will be as we move to bring legislation forward in the spring, in the next few weeks, so that we can move to getting legislation to first reading and have a broad consultation across the province after first reading, and then again after second reading.

1100

I'm looking forward to that input. I'm looking forward to that discussion that should take place into May and June, and into the summer and then into the fall. I look forward to all of that input as we, together, move to what I believe is a fair degree of consensus in terms of the changes that need to be made to fundraising, but we need that input in order to get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is making a mistake by writing new election laws by herself without prior consultation with civil society, other political parties or Ontarians. At a time when people are increasingly cynical about politics, one party changing election rules all by itself is only going to make people more cynical.

Will this Premier respect the democratic rights of Ontarians to have a say in their own electoral system and open up the process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The process that we're putting forward, given that there is a broad consensus, given that there are other jurisdictions that have moved on many of the changes that we're proposing—the federal government, some other provinces—and given that we're proposing we bring legislation and we move to consultation after first reading across the province and then again after second reading, is quintessentially the democratic process. That is how this Legislature works. That is how decisions are made. It's not one party. The role of the Legislature is to bring forward legislation, to have a debate and to listen to that debate, and then to make changes based on it and to move forward.

That's what we're going to do, and I look forward to the input. I asked for input from the leaders of the opposition parties. I hope I will hear from them, Mr. Speaker, as we draft the legislation, but, for sure, we will hear from people across the province as we go into consultation.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what a difference a little bit of power makes. Members of the Liberal front bench once called it "antidemocratic" to unilaterally change election laws. They saw, rightly, that changing election laws without consensus and public buy-in is bad for democracy.

People deserve to know that our democracy is fair, and the party writing the rules doesn't have its thumb on the scale. This Premier, who was instrumental in creating the system of ministerial quotas, appearing to sell access to government decision-makers and shaking the public trust, is not one to be now changing the rules on her own.

Will this Premier open up the process of updating campaign financing to a fast-moving, independent panel and start to rebuild Ontarian's trust in their government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I really don't understand why the NDP leader is undermining the role of the legislators. We're elected for the sole purpose of developing legislation. That is exactly the job that is given to us by the people of Ontario.

Speaker, you don't need a grade 10 civics lesson to know that. I don't know what she says when she goes to her schools in grade 10 classes as to what the role of the legislators is. It is to bring forward legislation; it is to hold public consultations; it is to listen to Ontarians; it is to then make amendments through the clause-by-clause process.

I look forward to speaking with the other House leaders this afternoon to talk about how we can develop a process that will ensure that Ontarians from across this great province have an opportunity to provide their input and for experts to come forward to provide their input. That is our role as legislators. We should be doing our job by following suit.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question: The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Applause.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you. My question is to the Minister of Education this morning. Minister, today, there are five families from Sarnia-Lambton who are counting on the life-changing education that their children receive at the Amethyst Demonstration School in London. There are dozens more whose children have graduated from the intensive program at Amethyst and are now thriving in secondary and post-secondary education. There are even more families eager to apply for admission to Amethyst, knowing in their hearts that the education their children receive from this school will change their child's future forever.

Yet these families fear that this government is preparing to close Amethyst. These concerned parents and students I've met with have contacted my office and described the Amethyst Demonstration School as essential, a blessing and their last hope.

Minister, will you commit today to keeping Amethyst open not just for current students but also for future enrolment by students from Sarnia-Lambton and across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to make it clear, Speaker, that we're concerned about all special-needs students,

wherever they may be in the province. It's precisely because we're concerned about the students who are deaf, deaf-blind or who have severe special learning disability needs that we started the consultations in the first place.

We want to figure out how we can provide the best program possible, particularly for all those students with severe learning disabilities and for all those students in southwestern Ontario or eastern Ontario who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

It's because we are concerned about those students that we entered into the consultations. At this point, no decisions have been made on the outcome of the consultations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, you started the consultations, but you shut down enrolment and you've refused to offer future employment for the teachers that are working at these schools. We think you're thinking something else during this process. Thankfully, you realized you made a mistake, and because of the parents who are here and the protests, you started the admittance process again.

I have a constituent of mine, Josh, and due to his age, this is his last chance to have a hope for his future. But your government is only committing to one year for Josh, and most students need more than that.

Minister, the application process alone takes a year to start. Your actions today will deter students from applying for next year.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Due to uncertainty, Mr. Speaker—sorry—the school system may not get the necessary applications, leading to your argument that there are not enough students for the programs.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to keeping Robarts School for the Deaf and the Amethyst Demonstration School in London open beyond this coming school year? Or was her decision yesterday simply to shut down the protests?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I noted earlier, the formal consultations ended on April 8. At one of the meetings that we had with the parents, the parents had asked if we would reopen the process for this year. People had already put together the binders, put together the psychological testing. I committed to them at one of the parent meetings that once the formal consultations were over, we would look at whether or not we would reopen the process for this year.

I followed through on that commitment when the formal consultation process was done. We announced yesterday that in fact the application process is open again for the 2016-17 year. That's exactly what I committed to determining. I determined that the process is open for the 2016-17 year.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. The government keeps saying more children need access to specialized programming that's available at demonstration and provincial schools. So why did the minister cap enrolment in the first place? If more children need access to these programs, why are they even thinking about closing them? It just doesn't make sense. Children with exceptional learning needs deserve better from this government. We know these programs are successful. The minister herself admits it.

Will the minister tell families in the gallery, and those that are at home today, that the provincial and demonstration schools will remain open after the 2016-17 school year?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I just said, we're in the process of completing the consultations. We're reviewing the information that has come in, and no decision has been made as a result of the consultations.

We do respect the fact that these are highly successful programs. That's why we have reopened the admission, to ensure that for those who have submitted their applications for the 2016-17 year, that process will go forward.

1110

We are committed, though, to figuring out how we manage to serve kids with severe learning disabilities from all across the province. There are children from all across the province with severe learning disabilities who are not being adequately served right now, and that's a problem we need to fix. We need to make sure that students all over the province—

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

Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Minister of Education: This government is failing vulnerable children. Their spin doesn't make sense. In fact, the minister's own briefing note that I obtained through a freedom of information request shows that the consultation process ends with a discussion with unions on details of staff impact. That directly shows that they were considering closing these schools all along. It seems like the minister started "consulting" with the end goal of closing schools without actually listening to what was said. That is shameful. Today the minister should listen to children and families; listen to what these schools have meant to them. Children are begging the minister to listen.

Again, will the Minister of Education guarantee that these important schools will stay open beyond the 2016-17 school year? Will she make a long-term commitment to these worried families?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: What I will commit to is that we want to find a way to serve all the children in the province with severe learning disabilities. The fact that we

have heard over and over again, from children and families all across the province, that children who have average or above average intelligence and who are in grade 7, 8, 9 or 10 are unable to read beyond a kindergarten or grade 1 level says to me that we have a problem; there's a problem that we need to solve. We need to make a commitment to all those students that we are looking at how we design programs to best serve children with severe learning disabilities all over the province. That's what the consultations are about.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Speaker, I'm sure I speak for all members of this House when I say, collectively, that we were deeply saddened by the tragic news in Attawapiskat this weekend. The First Nations community of less than 2,000 people saw 11 people try to take their lives on Saturday night. This community has seen over 100 suicide attempts since last September, and the community declared a state of emergency over the weekend.

I know the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care visited Attawapiskat yesterday. Can the Minister of Children and Youth Services please update this House on the visit and what was heard from the community of Attawapiskat?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for this very important and serious question.

Yes, I did travel yesterday with the Minister of Health to the Attawapiskat community to speak, not just to communities but to the youth themselves and their leadership. We heard how we must all work together on short-, medium- and long-term solutions to address very serious challenges facing this community and their youth.

Our government will be providing additional assistance to the community, following the government's emergency medical assistance team—also known as EMAT—assessment. There's an EMAT reconnaissance team, working with the local band council, as well as the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, to determine how EMAT can best provide assistance in this community.

The assessment led to some very important actions our government will be taking, which will be touched on in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Minister, it sounds like our government took immediate action to address the crisis in Attawapiskat. But we've heard time and again that these underserved areas face serious and chronic problems. A visit from the ministers, while it's informative and important, is not enough if we're really going to address the epidemic problems the First Nations communities like Attawapiskat face.

Speaker, through you: Did the minister come to any agreements with the community about the best way to

move forward so that Attawapiskat will receive the full supports that they need?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are actually, right now, deploying 13 health care personnel, including mental health workers. We're providing \$2 million in support.

But I want to speak to just how moved Tracy and I were in Attawapiskat yesterday. The incredible leadership demonstrated by the local chief, Chief Shisheesh, and the band council—we were accompanied by Perry Bellegarde, who is the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations. But the youth that we met—and we met dozens of youth, who are demonstrating such tremendous courage and determination.

All we need to do is follow the path that they themselves have set out for us to follow, in terms of providing not just the immediate support that we announced yesterday, but that long-term support to restore their hope, to restore their futures.

We stand side by side with those youth, with the local leadership and the community and Perry Bellegarde, to make sure that we're working hard, and with our federal partners, to solve this crisis.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, my constituents are concerned about the current situation regarding demonstration and provincial schools in Ontario.

Ontario has recognized its duty to provide education to deaf students for well over 100 years. My constituents, like Ann and Harold Wall, are worried that without dedicated schools for deaf children, these children will not have the full ability to participate in academic, social and extracurricular aspects of their education. How can they learn when they don't have the opportunity to communicate?

Minister, will you do the right thing and eliminate the ongoing uncertainty, anxiety and the fear of closure of the demonstration and provincial schools in Ontario? Yes or no?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Liz Sandals: You mentioned schools for the deaf. I believe that students who live in your riding would be going to a school for the deaf. The Drury school for the deaf in Milton would be probably the usual placement, or possibly at the east-end side of your riding, it might be Whitney in Belleville.

I have said all along that we will continue to be operating the school for the deaf in Milton, Drury, and the school for the deaf in Belleville, Whitney. We understand that those are the schools that offer a program in ASL, American Sign Language. ASL is the teaching language at those two schools for the deaf.

We have committed, right from the beginning, that those are not schools that we have been consulting on, that certainly those schools will continue to operate, and that that is—

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Minister of Education. Chris Zondervan from Shakespeare attends Amethyst Demonstration School. This specialized school environment has increased his confidence, and his learning has progressed at an exceptional rate. Without Amethyst, his family tells me they don't think he could have graduated high school with a diploma. His mother, Cindy, put it best. She says, "Our students did not create Ontario's deficit, and we should not jeopardize their future to fix it."

Will the minister please explain to Chris and his family why she is willing to jeopardize his future? Will she do the right thing and guarantee—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Sport is warned.

Please finish.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, will she do the right thing and guarantee that Chris's school will remain open?

Hon. Liz Sandals: First of all, I want to assure everyone that this is not about money. This is about how we provide the best programming possible to students who are deaf and to students who have severe learning disabilities.

1120

It's precisely because of people like Chris, who have been able to attend the program and who have been successful in the program and have graduated and gone on to employment—it is precisely because we see that success that we want to look at how more students can enjoy the success of—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron-Bruce, come to order.

Hon. Liz Sandals: It has nothing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. For the second time today, please, when I stand, you sit. And the member from Huron-Bruce just kept right on going when I asked her to come to order.

You have one wrap-up sentence.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Let me just assure people that the reason that we are looking at the consultations is so that we can do a better job for our children with special needs.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Two days ago, more than 200 parents came to the Legislature to make their voices heard on the minister's autism funding mistake. Instead of properly investing to ensure all kids with ASD, regard-

less of age, receive the supports they need, the minister decided to try to make a good-news announcement out of kicking kids five and over off the list for life-changing, essential therapy.

In the end, this minister holds the responsibility for the books. Where are her priorities? Why are they not helping some of our most vulnerable kids? Why is she trying to balance the books on the backs of kids with ASD? Will the minister explain to families of kids—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not endearing you to me.

Please finish.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker.

Will the President of the Treasury Board please explain to families of children with ASD over the age of five why she doesn't think they're worth helping?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm afraid this question demonstrates a very serious problem in the caucus of the third party. The budget they voted against yesterday included an additional \$333 million—additional dollars—for kids with autism. They can stand up and complain about what we are doing; we added \$333 million to kids with autism and they somehow interpret that as a cut. That's irresponsible; it's very unfortunate. It is unfair to the parents of kids with autism to suggest that we are cutting services when, in fact, we are adding \$333 million to service kids with autism. Shame on you.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The families and kids in this province know where the problems are coming from and it's certainly not in my backyard that they're looking. I don't know how this minister sleeps with herself at night.

As experts and parents have laid out, it's either pay now or pay later; help kids develop skills for independence or pay later.

The minister has to live with the fact that her funding decision, according to the experts, will leave kids with ASD with higher rates of behavioural difficulties and possibly worse: institutionalization, a life confined to a room or even their own bed. We've seen what this looks like, Speaker, and it's devastating. This is not the future kids with ASD deserve in this province.

With the stroke of a pen, she can reverse this decision and ensure that kids with autism get the IBI that they so desperately deserve.

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In fairness to the kids with autism in Ontario, and the parents and families of kids with autism, the NDP should be recognizing that 16,000 more kids are going to get access to evidence-based care

for autism—16,000 more kids. Only the NDP could characterize—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Only the NDP could characterize an additional \$333 million as a cut.

But that's not the only thing they voted against in yesterday's budget bill. They voted against free tuition for low-income and middle-income kids—free tuition, an absolutely transformational change in this province. The NDP, who used to be the champion for low-income people, has turned their back on them and voted—

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

New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday this House passed Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act. This piece of legislation is, of course, adjacent to our 2016 budget, which will help to make Ontarians' everyday lives better.

Minister, you and I have spoken on a number of occasions and, as a business person, you know that I am a passionate advocate to make sure that we're building a strong economy and supporting the creation of jobs. The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act also outlines the next phase of our government's plan to do just that, while helping people to reach their full potential and succeed in an evolving economy.

Could the minister please inform this House about how the 2016 budget and budget bill will improve the lives of everyday Ontarians?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for the question. As the member said, yesterday our government passed the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act. The 2016 budget is part of our government's economic plan to build Ontario up and to deliver its number one priority: to grow the economy and create jobs.

The four-part plan includes investing in talents and skills, including helping more people get and create the jobs of the future by expanding access to high-quality college and university education. The plan is making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history and investing in a low-carbon economy driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses. The plan is also helping working Ontarians achieve a more secure retirement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister. Many of my constituents have expressed support for a number of very important elements of this budget, in particular the record investment in public infrastructure, the investments in community care and palliative care, and the free shingles vaccine.

As a member of the Treasury Board, Minister, I am proud of the work that not only the Treasury Board, but you, our Premier, all our cabinet and our caucus have

done to make sure that we're working towards a balanced budget by 2017-18 while protecting the services that everyday Ontarians value so much.

Minister, could you tell us what other measures were enacted yesterday by the passing of the 2016 budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm happy to answer the question from the member from Etobicoke Centre, who has been a champion on Treasury Board as well. As the member said, we consulted with many Ontarians about their priorities and their values, which our plan has outlined in the 2016 budget.

Unfortunately, yesterday the opposition decided to let politics get in the way of supporting these initiatives that will help Ontarians both today and tomorrow. For example, yesterday they voted against \$400 million to the Business Growth Initiative to invest in our plan to grow the economy and create jobs. They voted against transforming student financial assistance to make it more upfront and affordable. They voted against providing an additional \$1 billion for health care and increasing hospital-based funding. They voted against ensuring Ontario leads the low-carbon economy that will ensure \$1.9 billion in reinvestment in green projects. Worse yet, they voted against making everyday life easier for Ontarians by eliminating fees and costs, like Drive Clean, and lowering hospital parking costs.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Education. In my family, someone I love grew up with a severe learning disability. Because of proper training, he has now grown up to become a professor, take a PhD and rise to very senior positions in the government of Canada.

1130

I didn't fully appreciate his struggles until I heard Lexi, a grade 5 student who wants to continue to go to Sagonaska, read to us this morning. It was incredibly emotional. She deserves to thrive just as those like her brother did before her.

Responses from your government today have been less than reassuring. Their noncommittal is increasing anxiety not just here in the gallery today but I'm sure across Ontario.

My constituent Kelly Foley's son attended Sagonaska. She called the school life-changing. Her son has been able to thrive and succeed because of that school. I ask the minister to have some compassion today, provide some long-term clarity to the people in this gallery and make sure that those schools remain open without a cap, and that there's a long-term plan.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I've said, we are very concerned about kids who have severe learning disabilities. We know that in the case of some of the children who are

attending or who would like to attend the demonstration schools, there is a significant gap between their age level, their presumed grade level and their access to reading.

We know that for some of the children, they've been in special-needs programs at their local school board and they've been unsuccessful, and that the program that's delivered at the demonstration school is excellent and has been successful.

We know that there are others, like your relative, who have successfully had programs delivered in their local school boards so that they've been able to learn to read.

We need to figure out how more students can have success. That's the purpose of the consultation, to figure out how more students can—

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

Supplementary? The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Minister of Education: This Liberal government says it's for the people, about the people, but when put to the test, nothing could be further from the truth. They're cutting provincial and demonstration schools for children and students with special education needs and who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind.

The minister says it's not about money, but they fired 50 special education teachers in my riding, and now they are threatening to close provincial and demonstration schools.

This Liberal government's waste and mismanagement is seriously undermining special education services across Ontario, and for parents of children with complex and special needs, it's catastrophic.

Speaker, why is this minister telling parents in my riding, like Melanie Dennie and dozens of others, their children are getting more special education dollars when in fact she is cutting core special education resources and threatening to close schools across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Okay, let me try and correct the list of bits of misinformation there.

Interjection: There's not enough time.

Hon. Liz Sandals: True. Somebody said there's not—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister will withdraw.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Withdraw.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: Firstly, we are not looking at schools for the blind. The provincial school for the blind—of which there is only one, in Brantford; we'll get the name of the city right—is continuing. The school at Brantford actually does the programming for the deaf-blind, at least in the English-language side.

We in fact have already said that we're not closing the AS schools for the deaf, the two big ones in Milton and Belleville. So the idea that we are closing all these schools is simply wrong.

What we are doing is looking at how we can provide better programming for children who are deaf, because we are concerned about the programming at some of the schools, and how we can provide better—

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

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. The first line of the sunshine list law indicates very clearly that public disclosure is required for salary and benefits for anyone earning over \$100,000 in the public sector.

For years, New Democrats have been calling for bringing public sector executive pay under control. According to the government sunshine list, the CEO for OPG earned \$787,000. However, according to OPG itself, that amount is close to double that, and more like \$1.4 million.

On one hand, we have the government disclosing one amount. On the other hand, we have the OPG itself disclosing another amount. The question is simple: How much did the CEO for OPG actually earn?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond to the member on this, on behalf of our Minister of Energy. The fact is, the current CEO, Jeffrey Lyash, is earning 3% less than his predecessor.

I've got to tell you, when you look at this kind of position, you're talking about a CEO who is in a position where you have to globally compete for that talent. These are the folks who are running our nuclear units. These are the folks who are running our entire energy production system. These are not the places where you would go to get anybody who is anything less than the best in the world, to ensure that Ontario Power Generation and our energy system is operating efficiently, effectively and safely. This is not the place to go when it comes to trying to discount people's earnings. This is the place where you want the best in the world, and that's what we have.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: In case anyone forgot, the question was about disclosure, and there was absolutely no answer to that question.

For more than a decade, the Liberals have promised to bring public sector executive pay under control. In fact, they passed legislation in 2014 to try to address this issue, and now they're promising to do something on this issue again. It was a stretch goal for the Liberals 10 years ago, and it's a stretch goal again right now.

On top of all that, we have information before us that this government has not been disclosing the full truth in their own sunshine list.

Ontarians deserve transparency. That is something they have a right to have.

My question is simple: Given the lack of information provided by this government, how many other public sector executives are earning more than what the government admits?

Hon. Brad Duguid: To the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As the minister said, the income reported for Jeff Lyash in the 2015 public sector salary disclosure was \$787,472. That included his entire signing bonus, plus his salary for 2015, from August to December. He started in his position as CEO in August.

When it comes to the broader question of executive compensation frameworks, we are moving forward with developing those frameworks for executive compensation. It is not a simple task. It is not as simple as they claim—"Just make it double the Premier's salary."

We're taking a thoughtful approach. We started with the college and university sector. The frameworks are now out for consultation. We are moving forward with agencies, Speaker. It's important that we get this right. We need to find the right balance between attracting the right people and having reasonable levels of compensation.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Granville Anderson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, yesterday the PC and NDP caucuses voted against the budget bill, Bill 173, which will serve to relieve the financial burden that many families face in post-secondary education.

Many of the students in my riding of Durham rely on the Ontario Student Assistance Program to help pay the cost of tuition. My constituents were very pleased about the many changes our government made to OSAP in the 2016 budget.

Minister, would you kindly inform members of the House how our government is making post-secondary education more accessible and affordable across Ontario in 2016?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Durham for that excellent question.

Mr. Speaker, our government strongly believes that all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, should be able to afford to go to college or university in the province of Ontario. That's why we have decided to transform OSAP in the 2016 budget, which will lead to more students receiving more generous upfront grants and, in many cases, help students receive grants that exceed average tuition.

Student associations, poverty reduction groups, and our colleges and universities have praised the introduction of the simpler and upfront Ontario Student Grant. The new Ontario Student Grant is a smarter way to allocate taxpayer dollars and help the students who need it the most.

It is unfortunate that the members opposite said no to the 2016 budget bill and therefore said no to real action to break down some of the main barriers to post-secondary education in our province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is disappointing that the members opposite voted against Bill 173, but it is reassuring to

hear that this government places such a high priority on providing access to education, so many people can get good jobs and actively contribute to our economic growth in this wonderful province.

Despite the significant improvements that the province has made since 2003, there remains a direct correlation between family income levels and the likelihood of attending college or university. Minister, you have spoken a great deal about the needs of students. Could you talk further about the impact that this modernized student financial assistance will have?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Our government is working hard to break down the barriers that are preventing Ontarians from getting a post-secondary education. That is why, in September 2017, all college, university and career college students who come from families with household incomes of less than \$50,000 will have the Ontario Student Grant that will cover their tuition. In addition, more than half of students whose household income is below \$83,000 will receive grants that will cover or exceed the average cost of tuition.

Under the new Ontario Student Grant, more than 150,000 students will have upfront grants that will cover more than the average cost of tuition, and 250,000 students will have less debt than they would have under the current OSAP program. I am pleased that this government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, has broken down the barrier—

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

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 18, 2016, Mr. Coteau moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts.

Mr. Crack has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Crack's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

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

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras
Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Sattler, Peggy
Brown, Patrick	Hudak, Tim	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Singh, Jagmeet
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
DiNovo, Cheri	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Fedeli, Victor	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yakubuski, John
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 52; the nays are 42.

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

Mr. Coteau has moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1151 to 1152.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gélinas, France	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gravelle, Michael	Miller, Norm
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Paul
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hoggarth, Ann	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Horwath, Andrea	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Hunter, Mitzie	Potts, Arthur

Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jones, Sylvia	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Lalonde, Marie-France	Scott, Laurie
Damerla, Dipika	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	Malhi, Harinder	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	Mantha, Michael	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dong, Han	Martins, Cristina	Taylor, Monique
Duguid, Brad	Matthews, Deborah	Vanthof, John
Fedeli, Victor	Mauro, Bill	Vernile, Daiene
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McDonell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Forster, Cindy	McGarry, Kathryn	Wong, Soo
Fraser, John	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
French, Jennifer K.	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Gates, Wayne	Meilleur, Madeleine	

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The Robarts School for the Deaf in London provides life-changing support for kids who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

One of those students is a four-year-old girl named Jaya, who lives in my riding of Oxford. I've met with her mother, who talked about the difference the school has made for Jaya and the difference that the support has made to their family. She says the deaf school is the student's lifeline to language, education and identity.

Since Jaya has attended the Robarts School for the Deaf, she has started making eye contact. Deaf role models are showing her that she is not alone. She can now communicate with her parents. But she's only four, and she needs the school for many years to come. It's the only way she will get the critical language skills that she needs.

Her mother has written to the Minister of Education and the Premier, begging them to keep the school open, yet she has been left to live in fear. She's here today, along with hundreds of parents, asking the government to not close down these life-changing schools. But this morning, the Minister of Education once again refused to commit that Robarts and these essential schools will stay open.

I'm asking the government to give these students like Jaya a chance to succeed. I'm asking them to end the fear for these families and commit that the Robarts School for the Deaf and the other provincial schools will stay open in the long term.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy
Brown, Patrick	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Clark, Steve	Martow, Gila	Wilson, Jim
Coe, Lorne	McNaughton, Monte	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 77; the nays are 17.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to send it to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As requested.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the member from Brampton–Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I would like to introduce a long-time family friend of ours who's in the visitors' gallery today: Mr. Gurmail Saggu. Thank you for joining us at Queen's Park.

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

The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm so pleased to welcome, once again, Willem Hart from the riding of Thornhill. He's really having a great and exciting day today, I think, meeting the mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai, this morning, and lots of other dignitaries.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to introduce Lalita Tamburri, who is here from Oxford today with the folks who are dealing with special-ed schools.

ESSEX COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

Mr. Taras Natyshak: As always, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the Legislature to recognize good people doing great things in my riding.

Last week, I had the pleasure of attending the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame induction ceremonies and to congratulate the three inductees for 2016. Dianne Colantonio, Mary Jane Laframboise and Glen Waites now have a place among the giants of farming in Essex county.

Mary Jane Laframboise lived on the family farm on the Arner town line. She obtained a BA and a teaching certificate. She is a former vice-president of the Essex County Federation of Agriculture and the former provincial director of the federation of agriculture, and she has been involved with the Anderdon Women's Institute for quite some time. Mary Jane has always been active with the Farm Safety Association, and has passionately advocated for safer farm practices.

Glen Waites purchased his farm in 1956. He has raised hogs; grown wheat, soybeans, corn, cucumbers and tomatoes; and pioneered conservation techniques like

low-till and no-till. He and his wife, Marilyn, have five children and nine grandchildren. He has served on numerous boards and committees. Glen has been awarded the Soil Conservation Award and the Bicentennial Certificate of Merit from the province, and numerous others.

Dianne Colantonio grew up on the family farm in Lakeshore, where she became a third-generation farmer. She attended university and teachers' college. She is a past president of her local Women's Institute. She was involved in the 4-H for over 30 years. Dianne was not able to attend the ceremonies due to health issues. We wish her all the best.

We thank all this year's recipients and inductees—all the very best—and thank them for their contribution to agriculture.

READING CIRCLE

Ms. Soo Wong: This year is the 10th anniversary of Reading Circle, a community-based reading program I founded in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt when I was a TDSB trustee.

Since the beginning, this reading program has been held at Bridlewood public library for 90 minutes every Saturday, from October to May. Approximately 40 children, from junior kindergarten to grade 5, and 25 high school student volunteers participate. After reading one-on-one with their reading buddies, children do a range of activities, including writing, arts and crafts, puzzles and games, thus giving the children opportunities to develop their oral language and social skills.

Reading Circle is supported by dedicated local youth from high schools, the TDSB and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. This program enables the youth volunteers to earn their community service hours, as well as acquire leadership, teamwork and organizational skills.

As a first-generation Chinese Canadian, I know the importance of the Toronto Public Library in helping new Canadians, like my family, acquire English-language skills. Hence, I'm very pleased to see my weekly reading program grow year over year.

On April 23, Reading Circle will celebrate its 10th anniversary at the Bridlewood public library. I want to thank all the children, parents, volunteers, local high schools and the staff at the library for making this community reading program such a success. Together, we're giving new opportunities for children and youth of all ages to develop literacy skills and the joy of reading.

FARM SAFETY

Mr. Jim McDonell: Last month, Canadians had the opportunity to recall the importance of safety in our agriculture industry. Farms and the agriculture industry are the bedrock of our prosperity. The sector drives innovation, productivity and employment with an unyielding focus on quality. The agri-food sector is the largest employer in Ontario, providing highly skilled, well-paid and stable jobs across the province.

Farming, unfortunately, remains one of the riskiest professions in Canada. Through better technologies and smart regulations, we have made great progress. However, much more needs to be done.

My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry is not immune to farm accidents. Over my lifetime, our family has been involved in numerous accidents, causing serious injuries. I lost a sister, a neighbour and a first cousin to farm accidents.

More recently, in late January, I lost a close friend to a farming accident: Alvin Runnalls, the former mayor of North Dundas, whom I had the privilege to sit with on county council. Alvin was a dedicated community worker involved in many associations, including the Dairy Farmers of Ontario.

Last month, tragedy struck our family again, when my son-in-law Roch lost his father in another farm accident. Marcel Brunet recently retired and, just weeks after celebrating his 60th birthday, lost his life doing something he truly loved doing: working with his son, Roch, on the farm on his days off. He had cut wood since his days as a young teenager, so the accident, like most farm accidents, was just an accident.

Marcel leaves a big hole in our family and in our community. He was a devoted volunteer in his parish and his community, serving on a number of committees. He was a go-to guy when his parishioners and his friends needed a hand or someone just to fill in.

Speaker, as you can see, Agriculture safety week touches too many families in Ontario, and we need to change that.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE RUN

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm delighted to rise in the House today to acknowledge Hotel Dieu Hospital Child Development Centre's 20th annual fundraising run this past weekend in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. This event holds a special place in my heart. It is an event that truly does recharge my spirit and feed my soul, as I'm sure it does for the many people who come back year after year. Over 400 Kingstonians came out and helped raise more than \$28,000 for CDC.

The Child Development Centre is one of 21 specialized centres in Ontario offering critical services to children and youth who have physical, neurological or developmental disabilities such as cerebral palsy. For 42 years, the centre's physiotherapists, occupational and speech therapists, dietitians, doctors, counsellors and volunteers have provided outstanding service in our community.

I would also like to give a shout-out to a very special family, Mary, John and Braeden Young, who lost sweet, wee Bryleigh last fall. Bryleigh's face could light up any room, and this year her family gave away purple butterflies for children to wear to honour her memory and to encourage others to engage in acts of kindness. I know that her spirit touched many at the CDC run as well as the participants in the race.

Thank you, as well, for the excellent leadership of director Margaret Van Beers—for all your work to make this year's run a success, and of course every day of the year as well.

Janessa, Braden and Lochlan, you were fantastic ambassadors, by the way.

Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch. Thank you.

1310

TEL AVIV

Mrs. Gila Martow: This morning I had the absolute honour to welcome the mayor of Tel Aviv. His name is Ron Huldai. He was here to promote Tel Aviv—obviously, he wants us all to come visit—but he was here more with a group from the Canadian Committee for the Tel Aviv Foundation. You can find out more information at telavivfoundation.org. The three women who came with him were Orpaz Gibson, Margalit Navon and Erin Battat, and they're all from the Toronto region.

Basically, what they are doing is promoting donations and investments, and interest in what a vibrant place Tel Aviv is. Their dedication is focused on education, social services and welfare, the arts and culture, sports, the environment and quality of life. What the mayor said that was so interesting is that 6% of the Tel Aviv budget goes to arts and culture. Imagine that.

Tonight is the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee—CJPAC, as we commonly refer to it around the political world in Toronto—and there's going to be a lot of young professionals there, as well as a lot of professionals. I'm hoping to see a lot of my friends from both sides of the room there, celebrating the involvement of our Jewish youth and our Jewish young professionals in the political spectrum.

I'm glad that the mayor is going to make the party as well, and now I'm going to hold him to it.

VAISAKHI

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today marks a very special occasion for the Sikh community. In general in South Asia, April—and this time period—marks the harvest season of Vaisakh, or Vaisakhi. But for the Sikh community specifically, today, April 14, marks the celebration of Vaisakhi, or Khalsa Day, which marks the creation of the Khalsa.

Mr. Speaker, you're probably wondering, "What is the Khalsa?" The Khalsa was created by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, before he installed the Guru Granth Sahib as the final guru of the Sikhs.

"Khalsa" is defined as the "sovereign," or "people who are free." So today, in fact, is a celebration of our sovereignty, of the independent spirit of all people.

What the Khalsa was set to create was an order, or a family, that was committed to social justice, a family and an order that was committed to upholding principles and tenets that advanced equality and social justice. There was a caste system, which is oppressive, and there were

other ills in society, like superstitions, that kept people downtrodden, that kept people enslaved in their minds. The Khalsa was a way of uplifting people to achieve their own personal ambitions, their own personal potential, and to ensure that all society was able to achieve this potential for freedom, justice and equality.

Today we celebrate Vaisakhi. We celebrate the sovereignty in all of our souls and all of our spirits. I ask all of us to join in the celebration, which is truly the celebration of the human spirit.

EGLINTON CROSSTOWN LRT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to rise today and highlight the incredible transportation transformation that's under way in my riding of Scarborough Southwest. I'm talking about the Eglinton Crosstown LRT.

With construction well under way at the west end of the city, the dream of improving and modernizing public transit in my riding is closer than ever to being realized. Of the 25 new stations along the line, Scarborough Southwest will be seeing seven new stations opening, starting at O'Connor and running east all the way to Kennedy station. This means that close to 30% of these new stations will be in my riding, and I can't tell you how many positive comments I have received from my constituents.

Our government is taking action to improve our transit infrastructure in Toronto and, in fact, in all of Ontario. Ontario's transportation infrastructure is absolutely vital to the strength, stability and success of our province. Public transit helps our workforce get to the office. It helps our students get to the classroom. It allows our seniors to remain active and mobile in their later years. It helps businesses to flourish, and it helps residents to get where they need to go, when they need to be there.

I look forward to following the progress of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, and watching as it continues to benefit the residents and businesses of Scarborough Southwest and well beyond—in all of Ontario, in fact.

TORN MEMORIES OF NANKING

Mr. Bob Delaney: Japanese author Tamaki Matsuoka has written an important book about the Second World War's prolonged Sino-Japanese campaign. As importantly, Toronto Alpha, a largely Chinese group formed to document and spread the history of that long and brutal campaign, published the book, called *Torn Memories of Nanking*.

Author Matsuoka became a teacher in Japan in 1982 and began to look at the discrepancies between how history books in Japan and in the rest of the world treated the China-Japan campaign during World War II. In the late 1980s, Tamaki began to interview survivors and veterans of the battle for Nanking, now known as Nanjing. She wrote down first-hand accounts of Chinese survivors and Japanese soldiers who went on an extended killing spree of soldiers and civilians alike. It is a compelling

story for its brutal matter-of-factness and its meticulous documentation.

Often either denied or underplayed in Japan—Torn Memories of Nanking is the missing chapter in the documentation of World War II's longest campaign, in which an estimated 25 million Chinese were killed. Particularly because its author is Japanese, this disturbing book shines new light into World War II's largest remaining dark historical corner.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION
PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING
RETIREMENT SECURITY
FOR ONTARIANS), 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR LE RÉGIME
DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE
DE L'ONTARIO (SÉCURISER LA RETRAITE
EN ONTARIO)

Ms. Hunter moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan/ Projet de loi 186, Loi établissant le Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm proud to rise today to introduce this important bill. If passed, this bill will establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and ensure that the over four million Ontarians who do not currently have a workplace pension plan will be able to access a predictable stream of income in retirement, paid for life.

I'd like to thank all the members of my team and the ministry whose work has culminated in this bill and its introduction today, specifically those joining us in the House: Mahmood Nanji, the associate deputy minister of the ORPP Implementation Secretariat; Shemin Manji; Marc Sharrett; Luc Vaillancourt; Joel Gorlick; Ola Agboola; Dakila Proudfoot; Michael Coe, who is my chief of staff; David Gordon; Keesha Bell; Marilyn Preston; Clancy Zeifman; Tiff Blair; Alex Phillips, who is the senior policy lead in the Premier's office; and those who have joined them here today. Thank you so much for your excellent work.

MOTIONS

NISHAN SAHIB FLAG

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton on a point of order.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I move that the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag be flown on the ceremonial flagpole today, April 14, and Monday, April 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just as a point: Motions don't come from the opposition; they come from the government. And a point of order—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm explaining, please.

A point of order is what has to happen in order for it to be recognized as a motion.

1320

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a 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 affix my signature and I give it to page Lauren.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario’s labour and employment laws:

“—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker’s age, job or sector of employment;

“—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

“—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—ensure all workers are paid at least \$15 an hour.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’m going to give it to Samantha to be delivered with my signature to the table.

MEN’S HEALTH

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas men’s health is an integral component of population health, affecting Ontario families, communities, businesses and society;

“Whereas many men’s health issues—if not all—benefit from early diagnosis, which is most often achieved through proactive monitoring of health and regular examinations;

“Whereas the stigma associated with a number of men’s health issues, and the failure to conduct regular physical examinations, can be at least partially mitigated through increased public awareness and the sharing of personal stories;

“Whereas June is a special and significant month for men and their families, with the third Sunday in June recognized internationally as Father’s Day;

“Whereas groups like the Canadian Men’s Health Foundation are developing innovative tools and programs, like the YouCheck health awareness tool, that could be promoted during a dedicated awareness week;

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

“To support increased awareness and advocacy of men’s health issues by working towards passage and adoption of Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men’s Health Awareness Week.”

As it’s my bill, I fully agree with it and leave it with page Harry.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

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

“Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

“Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

“Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

“Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

“Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

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

“To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential.”

I agree with this and will be passing it off to Joshua.

PARENTAL RECOGNITION

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Madam Speaker, you look delightful, all decked out. I’m so pleased to see you there.

This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas in 2006, Ontario Justice Paul Rivard ruled that the Children’s Law Reform Act and the Vital Statistics Act, which govern birth registries, were ‘clearly outdated,’ legislative reform has not followed;

“Whereas Ontario lags behind four other provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec—that have already updated their LGBTQ parental recognition laws;

“Whereas in this province, same-sex couples—in addition to any family who does not have a conventional biological father and mother set-up at birth—are forced to either adopt or receive a declaration of parentage to attain legal protections over their children;

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

“Pass private member’s Bill 137, An Act to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and other acts with respect to parental recognition.”

I sign this on behalf of all those who are currently suing the Ontario government for this. I give it to Jerry, to be delivered to the table.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime;

“When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture;...

“Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified;

“Survivors too often face wait times for counselling services as our population grows...;

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

“Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment’s final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change;... and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining ‘unfounded’ cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors.”

I agree with this petition, I will affix my signature to it, and I will give it to page Cooper to bring down.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a 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 ... 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 agree with this and will be passing it off to page Diluk.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

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

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

Of course I agree with this. I’m going to sign my name and give it to Lauren to be delivered to the table.

CHILD CARE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Madam Speaker, you look splendid in your new Speaker’s attire.

“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;

1330

“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 agree with this petition. I sign it and leave it with Maya.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

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

“Whereas demonstrative schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs; and

“Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstrative schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

“Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstrative schools and other essential support services;

“Whereas the freezing of student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind;

“Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

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

“To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstrative schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential.”

I'm happy to affix my signature and give this to page Jack.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de présenter la pétition.

“Whereas provincial and demonstration schools in Ontario provide education programs and services for students with special education needs;

“Whereas there are four provincial and three demonstration schools for anglophone deaf, blind, deaf-blind and/or severely learning-disabled students, ainsi qu'une école pour les étudiants francophones qui sont sourds, aveugles, sourds-aveugles et/ou” qui ont des problèmes d'apprentissage sérieux;

“Whereas, even with early identification and early intervention, local school boards are not equipped to handle the needs of these students, who are our most vulnerable children;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(a) oppose the closure of provincial and demonstration schools and recognize that these specialized schools are the last hope for many children;

“(b) stop the enrolment freeze at these schools in order for students and their families, who have exhausted all other available resources, to have access to equal education for themselves without added costs, to which they, like all students, are entitled to.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature to it and ask Chandise to bring it to the Clerk.

MEN'S HEALTH

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas men's health is an integral component of population health, affecting Ontario families, communities, businesses and society;

“Whereas many men's health issues—if not all—benefit from early diagnosis, which is most often achieved through proactive monitoring of health and regular examinations;

“Whereas the stigma associated with a number of men's health issues, and the failure to conduct regular physical examinations, can be at least partially mitigated through increased public awareness and the sharing of personal stories;

“Whereas June is a special and significant month for men and their families, with the third Sunday in June recognized internationally as Father's Day;

“Whereas groups like the Canadian Men's Health Foundation are developing innovative tools and programs, like the YouCheck health awareness tool, that could be promoted during a dedicated awareness week;

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

“To support increased awareness and advocacy of men's health issues by working towards passage and adoption of Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men's Health Awareness Week.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and hand it over to page Madeline.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Madam Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas demonstrative schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

“Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstrative schools and other special

education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

“Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstrative schools and other essential support services;

“Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

“Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

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

“To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstrative schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential.”

I affix my signature to this and hand it to page MacFarlane.

YAD VASHEM

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak and recognize Yad Vashem, with the member for York Centre reciting a prayer in Yiddish, following which a moment of silence will be observed.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is there unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak and recognize Yad Vashem, with the member for York Centre reciting a prayer in Yiddish, following which a moment of silence will be observed? Agreed? All right.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Today at Queen’s Park, we recognized and honoured 12 Holocaust survivors who overcame incredible odds of survival during World War II. We heard their stories of anguish, suffering and immense loss and how they were able to triumph over the horrors they faced.

Today, we honoured Felicia Carmelly, Henry and Reny Friedman, Helene Goldflus, Michael Mason, Zuzana Sermer, Adam and Rachel Shtibel, Elsa Thon, Mannie Weinberg and Freda Weisfeld-Peck.

After surviving the Holocaust, they came to this province to rebuild their lives, and we honour them for the wonderful contributions each of them has made as citizens of Ontario.

This day, we also recognize Yom ha-Shoah V’Hagvurah, Holocaust Memorial Day, a day designated for Holocaust remembrance in communities around the world. This is the 23rd year that the Ontario Legislature has observed Holocaust Memorial Day, and I’m immensely proud to say that Ontario was the first jurisdiction in the world, outside of the state of Israel, to officially recognize this day.

As we mourn the deaths of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, we also celebrate the lives of

those who survived. I have visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem. The memorial is dedicated to preserving the memory and the story of each of the six million people who died. As a Jew, I can tell you that no matter how many times I’ve been there, the memories strike your heart and your soul.

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

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

The Holocaust reaches out of the past and touches the shoulder of every Jew. For years, survivors walked amongst us with tattoos to mark the horror they lived through. Their stories, their scars and the numbers that were so callously carved into their skin made the Holocaust real, personal, powerful and unforgettable. Now, there are fewer and fewer survivors who are still with us. There are not as many people who can give first-hand accounts of that brutal period in history.

1340

The central theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2016 is “The Struggle to Maintain the Human Spirit.” During the Holocaust, in the Nazi death camps where Jews were isolated, cut off, singled out and starved, and where the basic necessities of life were stripped away, brutal acts were a daily occurrence, and life and death existed in such close proximity that many Jews naturally focused their efforts on their own physical survival and that of their loved ones. Yet simultaneously, some Jews attempted to preserve a life that was grounded in moral values and having a cultural dimension befitting a decent society.

Alongside externally imposed hunger, humiliation and isolation, the Jewish ghettos also contained self-initiated organizations for mutual aid and support, medical care and cultural activities. Jews arranged secret study groups to help educate Jewish children, who were prohibited from attending schools. They covertly wrote and distributed articles, and held theatrical and musical performances, literary evenings and lectures.

Evidence of spiritual, artistic and intellectual activity could be found even behind the barbed wire of the camps. For example, at a labour camp in Germany in 1944, Jewish women wrote down poetry from memory on pieces of paper using pencils gathered painstakingly from the ruins of the bombed-out buildings where they worked. Clearly, activities such as these helped the Jewish prisoners temporarily transcend their extreme hardships.

Writing and artwork were also used as a means to preserve the freedom of the human spirit. Many Jews documented their lives as a way to vent their feelings or preserve the memory of the tragedy for future generations.

Many of those who struggled to maintain the human spirit did not survive the horrors of the Holocaust, but their determination and deeds are a reminder to us and future generations of the stamina and nobility of the human spirit.

Tragically, other genocides have followed since World War II in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. It's evident that we must continue our struggle to keep alive the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the United Nations 67 years ago in the shadow of the Holocaust. The declaration recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace throughout the world. It called on the world to protect human rights by the rule of law.

We are fortunate to live in such a great country, where our human rights and freedoms are extended and protected by law. But we must never take our rights and freedoms for granted, and we must remind ourselves how easy it can be to lose them.

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

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I believe it has been moved, member for York Centre.

I ask everyone to stand for a moment of silence.

Prayer in Hebrew.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I would like to add that one line in this prayer translates as, "He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us."

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: A very pertinent theme of the Holocaust is timelessness. Genocide is a crime that transcends time in that the social realities that enable it—the economic isolation and the political marginalization—are laid out well before the crime occurs. Conversely, the damage and the pain inflicted is felt long after the crime is perpetrated. Loss of loved ones, the endless trauma, survivor's guilt and the endless tormenting are complex moral, theological and philosophical issues that perpetually plague a people following a timeless tragedy such as the Holocaust.

To comprehend the scale of this genocide, especially in a so-called civilized western European context, is no small task as it demands that we as humanity delve into, and push ourselves to explore the true meaning of evil.

Yad Vashem is an interactive walk-through museum dedicated to the Holocaust and the timelessly vexing questions it poses to historians, theologians, politicians and humanity. As the one million annual visitors will attest, it is a truly unique experience.

While tragedy or, more appropriately, an atrocity like genocide is timeless, people are not. In only a few short years, Ontario, Canada, Israel and the rest of the world will lose the last Holocaust survivors. There will be nobody to accompany Jewish youth on March of the Living trips to revisit the ghettos and the concentration camps. There won't remain people to recall first-hand the horrors of Nazi death camps, and transmit the emotion, the guilt, the anger or the confusion to the next generation.

This is why in recent years there has been such a strong imperative by Jewish groups to record memories and to preserve the record and testimony of what happened there. If the tragedy of the Holocaust is timeless in nature, then so ought to be the damage, in order to teach the lessons and ensure a future that honours the words "never again."

This is especially pertinent given the rampant ubiquity of technology in our world today. Yad Vashem offers a plethora of digitized material ranging from pedagogical tools for classroom use, academic journals, and digitized testimony of survivors.

The history of Hitler's rise to power and the horrors of the Holocaust are not an easy subject to learn. As my friend and the former head of CHAT's Jewish history department tells me—and it's no surprise to me—it's a difficult topic to teach. I'm pleased to know that the school to which I have sent my children, the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, has an updated grade 12 curriculum that includes a half-year course in Jewish history that focuses solely on the Holocaust. While Jewish students of all grade levels will learn about the Holocaust in a formal setting in senior year, the students are subjected to more complex themes of the history, including the social process by which one group of people is alienated, isolated and their essential worth delegitimized to the point of complete dehumanization. Ultimately, this transitions into more adult content of the history, like the specific methods of killing and the medical experimentation on captured, emaciated and disabled Jews in the ghettos and the camps. This allows students to explore the philosophical and ethical questions that the Holocaust has left us and to really begin to understand evil.

I want to really thank the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem, who are here, for recognizing each year the families of survivors—and, of course, the survivors themselves have to share their very difficult stories. It's difficult for us to hear those stories, repeat those stories—well, imagine what it was for them to live through those stories and then come back and share. Iris Weinberg is here with her family, and I just want to welcome her because she is from my riding of Thornhill.

I want to thank Yad Vashem and everyone who's here today for remembering the Holocaust, honouring the

memory of the survivors and the righteous. May we do so forever and through all time so that we may teach our children the timeless lessons of, and more importantly the difference between, evil and good.

1350

We have the word “yom.” It means “day” in the Jewish language. We have “Yom ha-Shoah,” where “Shoah” is the Holocaust, so it’s “The day of remembering the Holocaust.” Then we have “Yom Hazikaron,” where “zakar” is “to remember,” so it’s remembering people who have died in the wars in establishing the state of Israel and defending Jews.

We follow that by the happy day, which is “Yom Ha’atzmaut,” Israeli Independence Day, which we all look forward to. I’m hoping to celebrate in Israel, because I have only managed to be there for Yom Ha’atzmaut once in my life.

We have Passover, which is coming next week—Pesach. We say on Passover always, “Next year in Jerusalem.” We tell the story of the survival and the escape of the Jews from Egypt. It has been told for a millennium. Unfortunately, we have to all work together with groups like the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem to ensure that those life experiences continue to be told.

Just like when we sit down to read the book at the Seder—the Haggadah—we say, “Imagine yourself.” That’s what we’re told to do. You’re not just reading the story; you’re not just living in the year 2016. The first thing you’re supposed to do is transport yourself and almost be an actor, and pretend when you’re reading the Haggadah that you are the one who experienced this. It was almost understood at that time that that is the way to teach history, to force people to become the characters in the history lesson themselves and to learn that way. That’s the way people remember: through that emotion, because that emotion can be very powerful.

I just want to end on a happier note by saying that my name, “Gila,” means “joy” in Hebrew. I wish joy to everybody who is here today. We always look forward. I think that’s what makes the Jewish people so strong: that we’re always able to find humour and joy in every situation, no matter how horrific.

I wish everybody Chag Sameach—happy Passover. Thank you so much for sharing with us.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This afternoon I’m honoured to rise on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, to pay tribute to Ontario Holocaust survivors. I want to note the presence beside me of my colleague Cheri DiNovo, co-author of the Jewish Heritage Month bill, and a person who has put herself forward in these matters in a substantial way.

I would like to recognize and thank the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem for their role in today’s proceedings and for their work providing education on the painful legacy of the Holocaust.

I also want to recognize all of the honourees who are present today. On behalf of my colleagues from Hamilton, I am particularly honoured to recognize Helene Goldflus from the Hamilton community, who is at

Queen’s Park today to be honoured as a survivor and for her commitment to Holocaust education. Her resolve to share her story has helped put a human face to this tragedy for a whole new generation of people.

I believe that it is important to recognize the important work that survivors continue to do in the Hamilton community and in all of our communities. Their work and their accomplishments are all the more remarkable given the unspeakable horrors they have endured. Their humanity in the face of such inhumanity is an inspiration to everyone. Their commitment to ensuring that we never forget is an incredibly noble one, and one that we all are very grateful for, because we can never forget the innocent victims of the Holocaust: an estimated six million Jews—a number that is almost impossible to comprehend—and two million Roma and Sinti also lost into the darkness, and the tens of thousands of others who were murdered, and the tens of millions of others who, like Helene, lost their homes and their family members and were forced to live for years in fear for their own lives. These are numbers on a scale that defies comprehension.

But we can only begin to understand when we consider that each person was a real person—real women, men and children, real families just like yours, just like mine, who were taken from their homes, separated from their families and killed simply for their faith, for who they were.

This was an unspeakable crime against humanity. It is a crime that must never be repeated. Today it serves as a powerful reminder that we must always be vigilant against the slow creep of hatred, racism, and intolerance, and that we of this generation must never repeat Canada’s shameful behaviour in the 1930s and 1940s—as was outlined in Irving Abella’s searing, honest and frightening book, *None is Too Many*—when Canada turned away those who were trying to flee the Holocaust and sent them back to their deaths. We must never, ever repeat that in this country.

It is thanks to the work of survivors and their families that these stories are not forgotten, so that our children will never have to live through the horrors that they did or be complicit, as this country was at one time.

On behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, I want to once again express our gratitude and thanks to all of the honourees.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Could we all rise for a moment of silence, please?

The House observed a moment’s silence.

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I believe that you’ll find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the use of sign-language interpreters in the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I move that sign-language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber to interpret the proceedings during debate on private member's notice of motion number 66.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the member from Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of Jennifer Stone, mother of page Cooper Stone—she is also a constituency assistant in my office; we work together—as well as Renee Albert, who is a co-op student in my constituency office. Welcome.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES (COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

Mr. Paul Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission / *Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires afin de créer la Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale.*

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Hamilton has moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission.

Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank you for my new title of Mr. Hamilton.

1400

Speaker, I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature today many people who have taken time out of their busy day to travel all the way up here from Hamilton to show their support for this bill. I'll name some of them: Tony Lemma; Wendell Fields; Katrina Gervais; Sandy Leyland; Hannah Gervais; Rhonda Castello; Sarah

Guinta; Gord Jackson; Danielle Kudd; Shyda Thompson; William Tim Button; Arlene MacDonald; Brandon Boragno; John Mills; Archibald Walker; Helen Hutton; Laura Cattari, who spoke at our press conference yesterday; Jodi Dean; Jen Chivers; Victoria Gooding; and Jodi Dean Gooding.

I want to especially recognize Tom Cooper of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. Tom is a tireless advocate for those in need. In fact, Tom's presentation to the pre-budget consultations in Hamilton last January was one of the spurs for this bill making it here today. He has been pushing for evidence-based social assistance rates for over a decade.

I also want to extend my immense gratitude to Craig Foye. Craig is a staff lawyer with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic who has contributed hugely to the bill we are debating today. The idea for the bill originated with Craig 10 years ago. He produced the original draft that led to the bill that was introduced in 2007. More than anyone else, this bill is thanks to the creativity, hard work and passionate advocacy of Craig.

I also want to recognize and acknowledge the current Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for introducing the precursor of this bill, Bill 235, back in 2007.

Thank you also to Anita Khanna for speaking about this bill at our press conference yesterday, and to everyone who has offered their valuable input on this bill, including Jennefer Laidley of the Income Security Advocacy Centre, Nancy Vander Plaats of the ODSP Action Coalition, the NDP's own Jonah Schein and our researcher Karalena McLean. Thank you, as well, for the excellent work on this bill by legislative counsel Liron Taub.

Speaker, social assistance rates in Ontario suffered severe cuts under Mike Harris that have never been reversed by the current Liberal government. Real, inflation-adjusted rates are substantially lower today than they were prior to 1996. They have been on a steady downward trend for the last two decades. Currently, rates are set arbitrarily without any reference to the real cost of living. As a result, recipients are mired in deep poverty, and they struggle to access nutritious food and adequate shelter. We cannot allow programs as critical as income security to be polarized and politicized.

To take the politics out of social assistance, this bill proposes that an expert independent panel should recommend rates based on the best evidence of what it really costs to live in Ontario and in our communities.

At the 2016 pre-budget consultations in Hamilton, both the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction recommended an arm's-length social assistance rates board to assess adequacy based on the actual cost of living in Ontario regions, and to provide advice on the levels of income support required for people to live in good health and dignity. Other groups echoed this call in other consultations around the province, including the ODSP Action Coalition, the Income Security Advocacy Centre and Legal Assistance of Windsor/Community Legal Aid.

Many of these organizations have been asking for this for years.

It just shows you, Speaker, how important public input is on the budget of this province. The people who testify have expertise and personal experience in how government policy affects their lives every day. They know all too well its failures and its inadequacies, and they also have imaginative and smart ideas on how to correct them. If only this government had been willing to listen to them before. Fortunately, my NDP colleagues and I were listening. The proof can be seen in this bill today.

Speaker, the majority of unemployed workers in Ontario are not eligible for EI benefits. People don't realize this, and this misunderstanding is but one of the many sources of the negative and ill-founded stereotypes against people struggling to survive on social assistance. The EI system is particularly poorly adapted to the realities of precarious work in our province and our urban centres. In Toronto, less than 20% of unemployed workers are eligible for EI, and with nowhere else to turn, it's no surprise that so many of them are forced to rely on social assistance in order to survive.

Decisions on social assistance rates have the most profound consequences for the lives of over 900,000 Ontarians. Over 900,000 people in this province rely on Ontario Works or ODSP, but more than half of these families don't have enough to eat.

Why has this happened, Speaker? Isn't social assistance supposed to provide a secure safety net to prevent people from falling into destitution and to ensure that even the least fortunate in our society have the resources to access adequate shelter, eat sufficient and nutritious food, clothe themselves and live in health and a little bit of dignity?

Again, why has this happened? First, obviously there were cuts in the 1990s, but the real cause is that the rates are arbitrary and are set by the political whim of the government of the day. There is no process in place. There is no framework, no research and no evidence behind decision-making at this time.

Social assistance rates are not indexed to inflation. Social assistance rates are not connected to the cost of living. With the exception of a flat northern supplement, social assistance rates do not recognize the very different costs of living in the very different communities in this vast province.

People receiving social assistance are living on below-subsistence incomes. In my own city of Hamilton, 75% to 80% of the people turning to food banks are in receipt of provincial social assistance. They should be able to afford food.

Children who grow up hungry suffer lasting ill effects on their health. They don't concentrate as well as in school as their peers. They are more likely to end up with preventable chronic diseases, such as asthma or diabetes, and they internalize the shame and social stigma that goes along with being poor. Even a short time spent in poverty compromises their educational and employment outcomes. The inadequacies of our social assistance

system are robbing children of their equal opportunity to succeed and they are perpetuating inequalities that will resonate for decades and through generations.

Speaker, I'm sure many of my colleagues saw the article in the Toronto Star this morning—how timely—which told us that among the world's richest countries, Canada is one of the more unequal societies for children. I quote from the article citing the UNICEF report:

"The growing gaps suggest that life is becoming more difficult for the most excluded children as social inequality has widened, and it is showing up in their physical and mental health...."

"Failure to address such crucial disparities creates lasting economic and social divisions that reverberate at great cost for generations."

We know that this doesn't have to be the way it is. Other provinces and countries have implemented highly effective policies to reduce poverty and food insecurity, particularly among children. In fact, we have an example that operates in this province, under the jurisdiction of the federal government, where incomes are indexed to the cost of living. It's called CPP, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. It's an excellent poverty reduction program targeted for seniors.

It's so effective that seniors have the lowest rate of food insecurity in Canada, even lower than adults in employment. As a result, turning 65 drops the risk of food insecurity by half for lower-income adults in Canada.

But it makes you wonder, Speaker, why are our income support programs for the under-65s so inadequate? Is there anything special about the number 65 instead of 64? Why do we have a system where a 64-year-old in Ontario can live in grinding poverty and, once they hit that 65th birthday, we double our efforts to ensure they live healthy and with dignity? This isn't a system informed by research, by evidence or by morality, if you really look at it.

What you find in effective poverty reduction strategies everywhere, like our programs for seniors, is that benefits are set at levels sufficient to cover basic needs. They are based on evidence and research. That is exactly what we need in our social assistance program: evidence-based rates.

Too many people in this chamber and in this government have not lived the experience of poverty. They don't understand what it's like to not have fresh fruit or vegetables, or to not socialize because they can't afford shampoo one week, or a cup of coffee.

That's why it's so important to listen to people who do have that direct, lived experience. That's why the social assistance research commission will have at least one member with direct, lived experience of Ontario Works, and one member with direct, lived experience on ODSP. We want this panel to be both expert and representative. We want it to be independent and we want its reports and recommendations to be public because it is critical that the public has access to the evidence on which important decisions such as these are made, both to inform the public debate and to hold the government accountable.

1410

None of the members of this Legislature, I would think, have the expertise or experience necessary to be deciding the incomes of 900,000 of the poorest people in our province, but that's what is currently happening. Instead, I would like the government and the members of the House to be provided with recommendations and advice based on the best expertise and experience available so they can make informed decisions.

One of the additional features of this bill is that it utilizes the expertise of the existing commission to periodically explore some of the other aspects of social assistance policies, such as how they interact with precarious work, child support payments and workplace injury benefits. If you already have expertise, why not leverage it for the maximum benefit of the public? It would be wasteful not to, or to spend time and money establishing another one-time, single-purpose body. The need is clear to explore the interactions. Take our increasingly precarious labour market, which makes it easy for people to fall into the social assistance system but harder than ever to make a re-entry into permanent, secure employment.

How often in this place do we have the opportunity to effect real change and to improve the lives and prospects of almost one million people, to help them towards health, dignity and a brighter future? This is but a foot-step on the long road to ending poverty, Speaker, but it is an important one.

I hope that all my colleagues on both sides of the House and aisles will support it today and ensure that the bill gets to committee. A society is judged on how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. Let us be judged favourably today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister for Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your new position and your wonderful attire today.

I would like to thank the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for bringing his bill forward. I think it is a very important conversation that we need to have this afternoon. At the outset, the member did reference the draconian cuts made by the previous Conservative government. Certainly, over the last number of years, we have been trying to incrementally improve the rates as they relate to those on social assistance, and we have commissioned previous reports on this very important subject.

I'm sure everyone will remember that Frances Lankin, a former NDP member of this House, as well as Munir Sheikh, issued their report in 2012 with a number of recommendations. In fact, over the last several years, we have been following those recommendations, in particular for single individuals on OW. We have been increasing their rates, in particular. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and so we have now increased those rates by some 34% since we became government.

In this year's budget, we made the particularly important change to our system that child support payments will no longer be clawed back. This is going to make a significant difference for those single individuals who rely on child support to ensure that their child has some of the requirements as they grow older, whether they're able to access a little bit more in terms of learning opportunities or recreation and so on. This is something that was recommended through my many meetings with people in organizations such as the ODSP Action Coalition. We take their advice; we value their advice.

Also, as a government, we want to look at social assistance as not just an issue of rates—a very important part of the whole picture, of course—but we also want to look across a number of different areas that are important for all low-income Ontarians. I'm speaking of issues around employment incentives, training, getting closer to the labour market and the very important area of housing. Just as we did with the dental program for low-income children, Healthy Smiles, we wish to expand that to other health benefits and, over time, to move to those sorts of benefits being available to adults as well.

So we are developing a broad consensus with our stakeholders that we need to move ahead in a whole-of-government approach. This is what we intend to do in the next year.

We're making other improvements in terms of simplifying some of the rules around social assistance, as well, things like not requiring disability adjudication when a child with a developmental disability becomes an adult. We're waiving that requirement. We're reviewing the entire disability adjudication process with a view to simplifying it.

We will not require medical reviews to the extent that was previously required.

We're going to be introducing things like a reloadable debit card that people can use for their services when they do not have a bank account, so they do not have to use payday loan institutions to cash their welfare cheques—a number of simple things.

However, having said all that, I applaud the member for bringing this forward. We know that the former Minister of Community and Social Services, now the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, had a very similar idea a number of years ago, and I think your advice in this regard is very good. I want to thank you for introducing your bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'll be sharing my time with the member from York–Simcoe and the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

I'm pleased to rise today to join in the debate on Bill 185, the Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), introduced by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Over the last six months, I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the government's social assist-

ance system. I have heard from individuals receiving support through Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, as well as from agencies advocating for changes to these programs. In my riding of Perth–Wellington, we frequently work with individuals who need assistance navigating the system. Now I hear stories from people across the province.

I am interested by the ideas put forward by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I know that a lot of hard work has gone into the premise of this bill over the last number of years, and that poverty advocates in the Hamilton area have paved the way for the introduction of at least one other very similar bill.

Bill 185 will allow the creation of a social assistance research commission which will be responsible for recommending social assistance rates and social assistance policy ideas. I think that involving current or past social assistance recipients on a commission of this type is a positive step. Who knows the struggles and needs of individuals receiving social assistance better than those who have been in their shoes?

I understand that this bill is intended to remove political influence from social assistance rates. However, I am not convinced that this will be the outcome with this government in power. Despite the experts who will most likely make up this commission, there is no obligation for this government to implement their recommendations.

We need look no further than the *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario* report to see the way this government cherry-picks report recommendations. I have 15 pages of recommendations from that report that show how this government just picks and chooses as they wish.

The *Brighter Prospects* report was thorough and very well-researched. However, even one of its authors has commented that the government has failed to accept and implement recommendations from the report. Why would we believe that the government would treat the recommendations of this commission any differently? Ultimately, the government can do whatever it wants, commission or no commission.

Let's look at this government's history when it comes to helping those on social assistance. For me, the first thing that comes to mind is the \$290 million they wasted on SAMS. This new system has caused nothing but problems for caseworkers and social assistance recipients. Just think about how far that money would have gone for those who really needed it. Instead, this government wasted it. They made a decision to go ahead with a system they knew wasn't ready. That's your government at work.

The goal is to improve the social assistance system. I believe we need to look no further than the agencies already doing the groundwork who have been making recommendations to the government for years.

In Perth–Wellington we have outstanding organizations with staff who dedicate themselves to improving our communities. We have agencies like the United Way Perth–Huron, our local Perth health units and their

boards, the local community food centre, food banks, churches, poverty action coalitions and dedicated volunteers in all of these organizations. Many have contacted me to share their recommendations to address poverty and improve social assistance. I have brought these recommendations to the government's attention time and time again, but we have seen little action.

1420

All this is to say that the recommendations are out there. There are organizations in every community in this province that have shared with the government ways to improve social assistance. I say to the members opposite: Listen to them. It seems that this government has a commission or panel for every issue under the sun, yet somehow their waste, mismanagement and scandal still run rampant.

Again, I stress that I think the best thing this government could do is listen to the advice they're already receiving. They need to stop wasting money on projects that don't work and actually invest in the people who need it. They need to address skyrocketing hydro costs, home heating costs and gasoline costs that are hurting everybody, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities. They need to rethink things like the ORPP and the cap-and-trade plan that will leave families and individuals with even less.

A commission could make a lot of good recommendations, but the government already knows what they need to do. We tell them every single day. Unless they decide to act and address these underlying issues, all the recommendations in the world won't make a shred of difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a great honour for me to rise today to speak on behalf of my constituents in London West to the private member's bill from my colleague the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

This bill, Bill 185, is an important bill. I think we all recognize that here today, and I am hopeful that by the end of this debate we will all support this bill moving forward. From our perspective, as an NDP caucus, it is a critical complement to the NDP's commitment to a \$15 minimum wage, which was a policy platform that we announced several weeks ago and that we will be moving forward with. Minimum wage, social assistance: These are all key tools to enable people to move forward to get out of poverty and create decent lives for themselves.

The idea that's proposed in this bill—to establish a social assistance research commission—is an idea that has been around this place for close to a decade now. It's a decade during which we have seen the 900,000 Ontarians who rely on social assistance fall further and further behind, trapped in a cycle of generational poverty that they are unable to break out of because our social assistance rates, our Ontario Works rates and Ontario Disability Support Program rates are not keeping up anywhere near to the cost of inflation and have come nowhere close to making up for the huge reduction in rates that we saw under the Harris government.

As my colleague said, this idea was broached once more during the pre-budget consultations that the Liberal government had. Unfortunately, they wrote their budget before the consultation was complete, but had they listened to the stakeholders and the organizations who came to present to the committee, they would have heard this idea come forward again. The time to act is now. We've waited too long to move forward on this.

There are three key aspects of the bill, Speaker, that I want to focus on in particular, that make it such a valuable and worthwhile initiative. The first is that it is evidence-based. As many members know, before I was elected in this House, I was a policy researcher, so I certainly know the importance of using research and data to inform policy. Some of you may have attended the reception that the Council of Ontario Universities held a couple of months ago called Research Matters. These are researchers who are using research to make policy recommendations to move forward on public policy goals. They had identified 50 game-changing discoveries that were made by university researchers over the last century—50 discoveries over the last century.

One of these was the groundbreaking research by David Hulchanski called *The Three Cities Within Toronto*. David Hulchanski, a U of T researcher, looked at 35 years of census data within the city of Toronto, looking at the distribution of income inequality. What he found over those 35 years was a dramatic shrinking of the middle class. In 1970, the middle class made up 66% of the city of Toronto; in 2005, only 29%. At the same time, there was a huge increase in low income: 19% in 1970 and 53% in 2005. Looking at the data, looking at the evidence can really help to understand what is happening to people who are living in poverty in this province.

I also wanted to read from a letter that I received from Neighbourhood Legal Services in London and Middlesex. They point out that for too long provincial social assistance rates have been at the mercy of political whim and poisonous, negative stereotypes that are not based in actual research. They call on MPPs to help change this and create a legacy of evidence-based social policy for the people of Ontario.

The second key aspect of this bill is the provision to include lived experience, to acknowledge, to honour the lived experience of people who have felt poverty, who have had to deal with the impact of poverty. I have never lived in poverty myself, but I did participate in a poverty simulation that was organized by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. It is incredibly powerful to understand how difficult it is to live in poverty, how difficult it is to access the services that are available in the community when you're living hand to mouth, when you're trying to do everything you can to send your kids to school, to make sure they have lunch, to get tickets to go on the bus, to visit the food bank or wherever you need to go. We need to have those voices of survivors at the table.

The third piece that I wanted to talk about is the fact that it is place-based. In my community, just a couple of

weeks ago, London's road map to end poverty was released. That acknowledges that poverty is a reflection of what's going on in the community. There was good data that was released as part of that road map that told us that London's poverty rates are much higher than the provincial average, which is why we need to take a place-based approach. That's why I support my colleague's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I, too, am very pleased to rise and speak on the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's bill. The concept of a social assistance research commission is a very good one. I know it's been around for the past 10 years. An evidence-based, science-based opportunity to set rates and assist people in having a dignified life is a very important one.

In fact, it was the third plank that I put out to the community shortly after being elected in 2014 that I would focus on in my commitment to the people of Beaches–East York: I would focus on addressing social inequality issues, particularly around housing, income and food security issues. So I will be supporting this PMB, because I do believe it's a good idea that we study social assistance.

The Minister of Community and Social Services commented on the Frances Lankin report. I remember during the campaign in 2014 waving that report around because, as you know, Frances Lankin represented my area. At the time it was Beaches–Woodbine, and now it's Beaches–East York. She represented that area, and she was a great advocate of social equality in our community. I share that advocacy; I share that passion that she had.

In my constituency office, it's obviously a very important component of what my staff and I are working on on a regular basis. I've repeatedly come across this disconnect with OW and ODSP, where the housing portion of what recipients can expect goes up at a lot slower rate under social assistance than it does under the rental tribunal guidelines, so that they're seeing private landlords putting rents up in buildings that they're in faster than we're allowing them. There is a disconnect there between government policies. I know that if we do some evidence-based research, we can help get that right.

1430

Speaker, I would like to comment on the fact that I'm a little disappointed in the member and I'm a little disappointed in his caucus. I know him to be sincere in his concern for social equality issues, but they had a chance. That caucus over there had a chance to support a budget, just yesterday, that was extraordinarily progressive, which made great inroads in addressing exactly the kinds of issues that are—but they voted against it. They voted against free tuition—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You're selling Hydro. Great inroad.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, you know—you know—that there's a speaker right now, so I'm going to ask the members to refrain from shouting

across at each other. Okay? If I hear him again—you know who you are—you'll be warned.

I'm going to return back to the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Again, I've struck a nerve.

The member for Toronto–Danforth has been tweeting at me that he voted against this budget because we're "kicking kids off autism wait-lists"—his words—that we're "selling off #hydro1"—his words—and that this is resulting in "hospital cuts." Well, it just isn't true. We are taking kids off the list and giving them \$8,000 as a transitional measure until they get into better autism programs. We're putting in \$333 million more to look after children in new programs. So they are misrepresenting that to people on that one plank.

On the second plank, we know that they don't agree with the notion of selling off Hydro One, but we know it's the right thing to do to reinvest that money in new infrastructure, and we're doing that.

On the third—hospital cuts—we are transforming health care in this province. Yes, hospitals aren't going to be doing as much work as they may have in the past, but the reality is that there will be greater health care. The budgets are going up. We're investing in community-based health care, and that's extremely important.

It would have been much more effective, I believe—you could have had it both ways: You could have supported the budget which helped the most needy, the most vulnerable in our community, and we could have moved forward with this kind of review.

The most important piece for me, Speaker, is that in this budget we had a pilot for a guaranteed annual income. This is transformational. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek spoke of the federal system: guaranteed income supplements. We're looking to do that at the provincial level, but he turned it down; he didn't support it and he should have. It would have given a lot more credibility to his concerns on this file.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about this particular bill.

Let me begin. There are a few things in the short time I have. Two things that I think are important to understand about this topic are that I agree with the member that it does need better research, and that I also believe in the fundamental notion that a job is the beginning point for getting out of poverty.

But I do want to correct the record: Members have made reference to the reorganization of the ODSP. The creation by Mike Harris of the ODSP was certainly to define those people who had special needs, who needed a different kind of social assistance. And the fact is that able-bodied men were the people who had reductions to their social assistance. It's always portrayed as if it also included single mothers with children—not so.

I want to come back here to the fact that societies have been struggling with the issue of poverty forever. But, as I pointed out, I think there's a need for better research.

When you look at the manner in which this government has handled this file, there are some glaring errors that I think have been made. First of all, the most charitable thing we can call the whole SAMS fiasco is "clumsy." The wasted \$290 million is certainly something I think could have been better spent.

I look at the agencies being offered the opportunity to work with this government at \$50 million. When we inquired into what would be the criteria, how you would measure the success and the outcome, we were told that the agency itself would set the outcome and they would set the criteria in order to apply for the grant.

This government has also created huge barriers in terms of the cost of living. When you look at the increased costs—whether it's hydro, heat or food—we're certainly looking at some major obstacles.

I'm conscious of the time.

I want to make reference, on the research side, to that material that was provided on poverty a few years ago by the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. What was key to their approach to poverty was this: Which groups are most likely at risk, and how did they get there? It's that kind of research and science that I think needs to be looked at. I would recommend to the member, in looking at matching the needs of these specific groups, what they need to help them.

Finally, on the ORPP, let us not forget that this piece of legislation actually triggers a clawback of OAS and GIS, the federal opportunities. They would trigger that because they would earn more than that allows for.

In conclusion, I would say that this is an area in which probably all three parties have significant opportunity, or should, to provide input into a very important issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The honourable member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First, I want to commend the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for bringing this forward. It has been a while since we've talked about poverty in this place, and we should be talking about it more.

I want to talk about my own personal story, because I did live on social assistance. I was a 15-year-old who left a very violent home. I witnessed the suicide of my stepfather. The streets were safer. I lived on the streets for a while. I remember the day when I qualified for social assistance—we called it welfare back then—because I decided at that point that I wanted to go back and finish my schooling and get my high school equivalent. I actually got a doctor's note and got social assistance.

Back then, in the 1960s and 1970s, guess what? You could live on social assistance. I rented a basement apartment, as a kid. I paid for books. I paid for food. That was not ODSP. That was OW, or the equivalent of OW.

Some interesting historical facts, by the way: Under the Bill Davis government, the Tories raised social assistance rates 82%, so this isn't even a partisan issue. The Liberals, under Peterson, raised them 52%. We raised them 18% under Rae. It wasn't until Mike Harris that it took the downfall that got us to this place.

The Liberal government, in 13 years—contradicting the member from Beaches–East York—has done nothing to raise them. In fact, in real dollars, they have fallen significantly. The poor are poorer now than they were under Mike Harris. Shame on the Liberal government.

Today, can you live on social assistance? Absolutely not. If you're living on OW, at around \$600 a month, especially in downtown Toronto, you are on the street, and lucky if you can find a shelter. You have to use a food bank. You are living under the poverty line.

If they talk, across the aisle, about wanting to do something about poverty, here's solution number 1: Raise the rates. Yes.

Solution number 2: a minimum wage that's above the poverty line, a \$15-per-hour minimum wage.

Solution number 3: Actually put some money into housing, which we haven't seen for a long time. We have 178,000 families in Ontario waiting an average of 10 to 12 years for affordable housing. New bills, inclusionary zoning—which we heard about but we haven't seen any bill yet, Madam Speaker—rent supplements, real rent control: We need housing.

If the government did those three things, guess what would happen to the poverty rate? It would go down. Yes, we need evidence-based research and, more to the point, we need action on poverty, finally. After decades, we need action.

I have to say that it is absolutely an ethical and moral imperative that not only do we look at OW rates—but the fact that we keep people who live with a disability, who cannot work, living below the poverty line is absolutely shameful in a country and in a jurisdiction this wealthy. That is shameful—and they do. People who cannot work: We insist they live in poverty.

1440

To anybody here who attends any kind of religious service, I would say: How can you say you are a faithful Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sikh or anything, and come into this place and not act to at least alleviate those who have a disability who have to live in grinding poverty? You're not a faithful person, if you do that.

Just to wrap up: What do we need? Yes, at the very least, we need to pass the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's bill. More to the point, this has taken 10 years to get here. That's disgraceful. If you pass it today, get it to committee and make it law, I warrant that that commission will come back and say three things: Raise the rates and the minimum wage above the poverty line; let's get some housing built and let's get some housing provided; and—goodness gracious me—for those who live with disabilities in this province, get them out of grinding poverty. That's the ethical to do. That's the moral thing to do. That's the only thing to do. Let's get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Just like the other members in this Legislature, I would hope that the amendments established by Bill 185 will serve to improve the lives of those

on social assistance. It's one of the reasons why I will be supporting it.

But I do have some concerns with some aspects—and the member from Perth-Wellington alluded to the Lankin-Sheikh report from 2012. Many of the recommendations set out in that report were never implemented by this government. I would trust, Madam Speaker, that the recommendations of a new commission would meet with greater implementation success.

One of the concerns that I have is that the bill will create yet another costly level of bureaucracy. I would hope that, once established, the new commission will make recommendations for the people who desperately need support, and further hope that the government will accept those recommendations.

Speaker, we also know that this Liberal government has a long history of ignoring commission recommendations with which they disagree—don't they? Although there remains a pervasive scepticism, I would hope that this time the government will do the right thing.

The fact is that government waste, mismanagement and scandal have robbed this province of the funds needed to adequately address social concerns. It's unacceptable that we create more bureaucracy and another level of cost, unless we can ensure that the real beneficiaries are the people whom this commission is designed to serve: those people most in need.

What's clear, Speaker, is that life has been harder under the Liberals, and there's no segment of our society that feels more vulnerable than those on social assistance. Again, what we need more than any other thing is improved direct support for those on social assistance. My lingering fear, though, is that it will come with more mismanagement, cost overruns and little real benefit for those it's designed to serve: those truly in need.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will be supporting this particular initiative this afternoon on the part of member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who, I think, sincerely has an interest in this and is not interested in simply castigating the government on this occasion, but is genuinely interested in looking for some independent views on the issue of compensation and money for people who are genuinely in need in our province.

We have gone through a consultation, as the minister previously said. We're looking at all the independent views we can possibly have on this.

I don't want to pretend something, and the member doesn't pretend this—I give him credit for this. I just listened to the end of his speech: If it wasn't for government waste or 10,000 other reasons, they could finance this. If we want to do the things we want to do in this province, we need the revenue to do it, and people have to be honest enough to say that. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has been a person who has been honest enough to indicate that that's what we have to do. We've had some ongoing discussions, and there's a clear consensus on the need to move on the initiative he is

talking about today. We're going to continue to engage with the various delivery partners and those who receive funding from the government as well, to ensure that people are living in a decent way in our society.

It was pretty traumatic when there was a 22% cut in money that is provided to people receiving social services in this province. One always understands, when there are challenging economic circumstances, that governments look for ways to be able to save some money. But when it's on the most vulnerable people in the province, that is something I find particularly unacceptable. People of means have the opportunity with their own means, financial or otherwise—means or connections—to be able to look after themselves. Often, some people will say, "Well, everybody in our society should be in that position." But to walk a mile in the other person's shoes, I think, is something we have to do.

One of your previous members from Scarborough, Richard Johnston, took on an initiative where he was trying to live the way a person would have to on social assistance. He did it in a public way, not for personal publicity but to draw attention to the fact that with the amount of money people had to live on, it was at the very least extremely challenging to do so.

What the member is trying to do is get some independent assessment and independent recommendations to government. Ultimately, government has to make those tough decisions, and they are. They're never easy decisions to make, but to have the kind of recommendations he is trying to elicit through this initiative will be very helpful to government and to the Legislature as a whole, and I commend him for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to thank the people who spoke on this: the Minister of Community and Social Services and the members from Perth–Wellington and London West.

A little point to the member from Beaches–East York: This is a non-partisan type of bill. We all care about people struggling in poverty, and we try not to bring in finger-pointing—you did this and you did that. I'd like to explain to the public: The member said we didn't vote for that or we didn't vote for this, but in a budget process you get the whole budget and you can't cherry-pick what you want and say, "I'm going to vote for that." You might have two or three good things in that budget, and you might have 10 things that are wrong that your party can't support. So when they say that and point the finger and say, "You didn't support this," or "You didn't support that," you're darned right we didn't, because there were 15 things wrong and two things right.

I would also make a special point about the member for Parkdale–High Park. She's passionate; she's lived it; she understands it. She's pushed this in Toronto for years with her colleague from Toronto–Danforth, and I admire the member's resolve. I admire her—the person who actually lived it. It's like a general: If he really wants to know what's going on in an army, he goes to the guys in

the trenches; he doesn't talk to the captains or the majors. Cheri is just that type of person who goes to the source. Thank you so much, Cheri.

The Chair of Cabinet, the member from St. Catharines, is a seasoned veteran who has seen a lot of things go on in this House over the years. I admire him, because when he sees something that is socially responsible, or something that someone is trying to do to help people in need, he stands up. I give him credit for that, and I thank him for that.

1450

When people are not afraid to talk to their own party and go against maybe a bad decision—I admire those types of people. I might be one of them. But the bottom line is, you let your heart be your guide. We should have more of that in here, as opposed to finger-pointing and being destructive and not getting things done. We could do so much, Speaker, so much more good for the people of this province.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Education should recognize the success of provincial and demonstration schools in supporting our most vulnerable students by reopening enrolment at Robarts School for the Deaf, Amethyst Demonstration School, Centre Jules-Léger provincial and demonstration school, Trillium Demonstration School and Sagonaska Demonstration School and ensure that no provincial or demonstration schools will close as a result of current consultations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private member's notice of motion number 66. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Before I begin the debate I would like to point out that we do have ASL and LSQ sign language interpreters here for the visitors who are in the chamber today—and we have many overflow rooms; we couldn't fit everybody in the chamber today so we have people in many overflow rooms here at Queen's Park—and they are also here for the people at home who couldn't be with us today for this debate.

I'd like to start the debate talking about the purpose of provincial and demonstration schools. It seems as though perhaps some of the members on the government side don't truly understand what the purpose and the value of provincial and demonstration schools is.

Provincial schools are for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or deaf-blind. Currently, it is schools for the deaf and hard of hearing that are going through a consultation process, and it certainly looks like at the end of that process—which didn't appear to be really a truthful and meaningful process—the whole purpose was to give parents the false hope that they were being listened to.

It looks like the purpose of that consultation was to close the schools, to close some of them, consolidate them into maybe one or two schools, and force families who already travel a great distance to have their students in these specialized schools travel even farther—in fact, to make it even more difficult for students who need an ASL or an LSQ environment to attend these special schools.

I'm sure everybody in the chamber here today understands the importance of provincial schools, but not everybody watching this at home may understand the importance of the schools. These are students who would not receive the services and the supports they need. They would not be immersed in an ASL or an LSQ environment in their home school in a district school board. I'm talking about schools where the majority, if not all of the students, do not struggle with hearing; they have their full hearing. The students who go to provincial schools need—it's vital that they are immersed in—an ASL or an LSQ environment in order for them to thrive.

I think it's also important to point out the purpose of demonstration schools, because there is a difference. I know in the media there was some confusion. They were reporting that it's provincial demonstration schools—and demonstration schools are provincial schools. But there are two different kinds of schools: There are provincial schools for the deaf and hard of hearing and then there are demonstration schools. Those are for students with severe learning disabilities. These are students who start off in a home school in a district school board. They go to schools in their community. They struggle. They struggle not only to learn, they struggle to have their learning disability recognized.

The current process to have a student recognized as having a learning disability—not only having a learning disability, but then to recognize what that disability is—is cumbersome, it's lengthy, it can be costly for parents, and often at the end of that process in the district school boards parents are told, “That's not what your child is struggling with. We don't recognize that.”

I'm going to use an example. I met with Decoding Dyslexia earlier this week, and I was told that parents are not allowed to use the term “dyslexic.” If they've taken their child to an independent assessment and it has been determined after a lengthy process that the learning disability is dyslexia, they then return to the school board and say, “We have an assessment. This is what the professionals are saying. This is what my child is struggling with and this is what we need supports with,” only to be told that dyslexia isn't a real thing; it doesn't exist.

That's a directive from the ministry; that's not a directive from the board. The school boards do the best that they can with the tools that they are given. They follow the guidelines and the rules sent down from the ministry. I think it's disgraceful that we have professionals who are identifying students with special needs and actually being able to put a name to it, to quantify it and say, “This is what your child is struggling with and these are the supports that can help them,” only to have school

boards—who have their hands tied—say, “We don't recognize that. That's actually not a real thing. The ministry says that doesn't exist.”

I think that's really shameful and I think that's something that the Minister of Education and the government should work towards changing. These students—all students with learning disabilities, all students who are deaf or hard of hearing—may have similar issues. Two students may be deaf or hard of hearing. Two students may have a learning disability. They may be dyslexic, but that doesn't mean they're the same. They are still individuals and they still have individual needs. We need a government that recognizes that these students are individuals and that they need to be supported in a very special and very individualized way.

With demonstration schools, as I pointed out, the students start off in a home school in a district school board in their community. If they're lucky, it's a school actually in their neighbourhood and they haven't been forced to leave their neighbourhood because of a school closure and get on a bus for an hour each way in order to attend a school. Hopefully it's a school right in their community. Once they've gone through this lengthy and very difficult process of being identified and being recognized, parents start to undertake the process of application. That's a very lengthy process, as it would be with the provincial schools. It's a very lengthy and costly process. There are a lot of assessments that take place.

Then they apply and they wait and they hope that they can get into these specialized schools. They hope that they'll be accepted into a demonstration school. I have to point out the sacrifices that these families make—the parents, the siblings and the students themselves—because, as I pointed out, these are not community schools. These are specialized schools that are in different areas of the province that these families come a great distance from to attend.

In demonstration schools, the students can travel hours away from home. They spend five days in the school and then they return home on the weekends. The same applies for provincial schools. In demonstration schools, students will do one year. Once they've finally been accepted, they'll spend a year in the school. Every single student that I talked to today said that they are hopeful they get to return for a second year. I think that speaks volumes to what goes on in our provincial and demonstration schools. These students look forward to going to school.

That's not always the case for students who are struggling with learning disabilities or for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Often they feel like they're being centred out. Students who are pulled out of classrooms for extra support, often not the support they really need, feel like they're being centred out because they're different than the other kids in their classroom. I think that—no, I know, in fact; I don't think—I know that when they move into a provincial school or they go to a demonstration school, they're amongst other students who have similar struggles, who understand who they are

and accept them for who they are, and they all support and encourage each other.

The important piece about demonstration schools is that after, hopefully, two years at a demonstration school, those students then return to their home school in their community, where they thrive. We've seen cuts to education—\$430 million. The Minister of Education will say it's not a cut. But when you reduce spending by \$430 million in education, that's a cut to education. When we see students struggling and not receiving the special education supports they need in the district school boards, to have them move on to a specialized school, learn what they need to do, what supports they need, and then return to a district school board and excel—they go on to do incredible things. They become doctors and lawyers and engineers. They go on to start their own corporations. Many of them become teachers. I think that speaks volumes to the education workers within the provincial and demonstration schools, that the students they are working with actually aspire to become the people who have helped them. I think that's a really important piece.

1500

When you strip them of the ability to participate in the types of environment that a provincial or a demonstration school provides for them, you're stripping them of not only their hope, you're stripping them of their opportunities and their ability to thrive. Often, you're stripping them of their dreams. They want to go and do great things. They're capable of doing it. It's not that they can't learn; they can. They can do incredible things. They need the supports in order to do that.

We've seen through the consultation process a lot of uncertainty and a lot of worry for families, and it's important for everybody to recognize that this is not a new struggle for these families. This has been going on for years. It keeps coming up again and again. They're constantly under attack of losing these specialized supports.

We've had families who went through the lengthy application process. They've spent the money in order to get the assessments they need for their students, only to be told that, "We don't want you right now. We're putting enrolment on hold while we decide whether we're going to close your school or not." I don't even know how to verbalize that, because I haven't lived it. I think you really have to live it to fully understand what that does to a family.

If you had looked out to the faces here in the gallery and up in the public gallery today during question period, we had many children in tears because they don't know what their future holds for them. They don't know if they're going to be able to attend these schools. They don't know if they're going to be there for their siblings. We've heard about siblings who have—I'm going to point out Lexi in the gallery over here who was brave enough to come forward and tell her story, how she just wants what her brother had. We've had many students who have come forward and said, "I just want the same opportunities for myself, for my brothers and sisters or

for other students"—the generations to come. When you put them through this process time and time again, and you tell them, "We're not taking you right now. We thought maybe we could take you, but now we've changed our mind. We're not going to take you because we're deciding whether or not we're going to close your school," the kids really start to lose hope. It's really not fair to them. You have to look at what the effect is on the students and the families.

The minister stood up in question period today and said, "It's not about money." I don't know what else it could be about. I don't know why on earth you would consider closing any school, frankly, but especially the specialized schools that help these children excel. Why would you close these schools if it wasn't about money? I think that was actually a disgraceful comment to make, and very untrue.

Most of these families have done this for so long—they know there was a report that came out; it was all about money and it said to close the schools. They know that's the direction it's going. I'm hoping that, after today, seeing these families and the impact on these families and hearing their stories, I really hope they were heard and really listened to.

The minister and the Premier were both school board trustees themselves. They know the struggles that district school boards are having. They know what these kids are going through. I hope they will see the light, reverse course and agree to keep these schools open for future generations—not just for the next school year, 2016-17, but for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Welcome to all the parents and students who are here today. I know you've travelled a long way to be present for this debate.

As Minister of Education, I want to make sure that we are delivering high-quality programs and services to all of our students, including our most vulnerable. Our government is committed to the success and well-being of every child and student, giving them access to the supports they need to succeed in school and in life. That's why, in February, we announced that we would be consulting with our education partners about our provincial and demonstration schools.

I want to go back and talk a little bit about what provincial and demonstration schools are. The provincial schools actually began to open shortly after Confederation. The first was Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf in Belleville, which opened in 1870, followed by Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton in 1963. Robarts School for the Deaf in London opened in 1974 and Centre Jules-Léger, or CJL for short, added programs to serve the francophone deaf in 1986. We also have a provincial school in Brantford which provides schools for the blind and the deaf-blind. It too opened shortly after Confederation, in 1872. So there has long been a concern in the province about how we provide services for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or deaf-blind.

The schools for the deaf have one thing in common. All the schools for the deaf provide programming in sign language: the three English-language affiliated schools in ASL, American sign language; and CJL in Ottawa, the francophone school, in LSQ, the equivalent of ASL for francophones. But the primary language of instruction, the language that the students use to communicate with each other and that the staff use, is sign language in these schools and always has been. That's one of their primary characteristics.

The demonstration schools are a much more recent invention. They pre-date Bill 82, which was the first act that required school boards to provide special needs. Before that, you would often find that students who had some sort of a learning disability or an intellectual disability would be just simply ignored by school boards; they really didn't have a place in school boards.

The demonstration schools, if I go back and read what the original intent was, were originally established to provide a one-year residential education program for students with severe learning disabilities—I would note, severe learning disabilities but average or above-average intelligence. The idea was that they would provide students with sufficient skills and learning strategies to be able to return to their local school board programs. Also, they were providing in-service to teachers, because at that point the school boards actually didn't have any teachers who had any training whatsoever in providing special needs. So part of their role was, and continues to be, training.

The demonstration schools were located at the same sites at the provincial schools in Belleville, Milton, London and Ottawa. What the demonstration schools have in common, other than addressing severe learning disabilities—very successfully, I might say, Mr. Speaker—is that they're residential schools, which means, as has been noted already, the kids travel to the demonstration school each week no matter where they live in the province and then return home again on Friday afternoon.

Let me give you a little bit of information about the current status of these schools. The five provincial schools in total have 425 students—that's the blind and the deaf-blind. With all of those together at the five schools, there are 425 students. The four demonstration schools currently have 153 students.

First of all, let's talk a little bit about the schools for the deaf. From 2004 to 2014, the overall enrolment in the schools for the deaf has decreased by 34%. Particularly at Robarts in London, there was a 47% decrease in enrolment; we expect that there will be less than 20 students enrolled at the Robarts schools next year in 2016-17. In the case of CJL, Centre Jules-Léger, the enrolment has actually decreased by 67% over the last 10 years, and we anticipate that there will be less than 10 students enrolled at CJL next year.

1510

The issue here would be—and the member opposite is also a former trustee—that if you have less than 20 students or less than 10 students in a school where you're

offering a complete kindergarten to grade 12 program, it is very, very difficult to offer a complete kindergarten to grade 12 program with those low numbers of students. Speaker, I know your wife is a teacher, and you can relate to the difficulty of doing K to 12 with that number of students. That's why we're looking at those two schools for the deaf: because we understand the difficulty of delivering the program, and we want to figure out how we effectively offer a program when we're faced with that few students in those specific locations.

There are more students at Whitney and at Drury in Belleville and in Milton, and we're not looking at those. They have healthy student populations. We're not looking at them. We understand the importance of the ASL programs to the students and to the families who are deaf or hard of hearing and who rely on ASL. We understand that. Our concern is that in these two particular schools, there's an issue around the current enrolments.

On the other hand, with the demonstration schools, if we look at the data, there are about 76,000 children in Ontario who actually are identified as learning disabled. Now, many of those are not severe learning disabled, I understand that. They're not nearly as severely struggling to learn to read as the children at the demonstration schools are, but there are literally thousands of children across Ontario who have severe learning disabilities. Our interest here is, given that there are literally thousands of students who could benefit from the methodologies that are learned at the demonstration schools, how do we do a better job with those thousands of kids who don't have access to a demonstration school program? I quite agree; these are extraordinarily successful programs.

In February and March, we did consult. I've been in London, Milton, Ottawa and Belleville and met with people because I wanted to understand what they had to say. What we heard was that, for the people who are deaf and deaf-blind, for those students and for those families, having a culture where you can actually participate in the culture with people surrounding you, all of whom use ASL or LSQ as the case may be, is extraordinarily important for you to acquire language. ASL is really the language for these students, and that culture is really, really important. So, we need to think carefully about that.

What we heard in the demonstration schools is how extraordinarily successful they are with their very targeted strategies that they teach the students on reading. What we also heard was that the same students, when they had been integrated into the neighbourhood school, had suffered, in many cases, from programs that obviously weren't terribly successful or they wouldn't have been so many years behind in learning to read, but they had also been targets of bullying. They'd had really unhappy experiences in their neighbourhood schools. We need to think about that too. We need to think about what's going on there and how do we prevent that? How do we address that?

We've got some problems here. We need to figure out a solution. We have not come to any decision about what the solution is. But what we have done is restarted the admission process while we figure out a solution, so that

the students can continue on at the four demonstration schools, as the case may be, or at the Robarts or CJL, for 2016-17.

I want to assure people that, number one, we have not made any other decisions about the futures of the schools; number two, my criteria has nothing to do with money. My criteria is, how do we provide programming that is excellent for all the students—either sign language users or those with severe learning disabilities, as the case may be—and how do we do that the effectively for all of the students in the province that have the same need?

My apologies to my colleagues for taking up so much time.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Let me briefly recap what the minister just said. She acknowledges that the demonstration and provincial schools are working and they're doing a magnificent job, yet she decided to stop accepting applications for these schools that were working so well. She told teachers, staff and principals to prepare to go back to their home boards. And she has no plan, and this government has no plan, as to where they're going. That's what I heard in the 12 minutes from the education minister. It's appalling.

The members of the official opposition were extremely worried when some deals were being made inside the Minister of Education's offices, deals that were exposed later on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, when they claimed that there was going to be net zero and the cuts were going to come from inside the budget of the Ministry of Education. We worried that it might be special education that was cut. Now we know what their plan was: It was to cut demonstration and provincial schools, which is completely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome all of the parents, staff, grads, current students and future students who are here with us today at the Legislature. This morning, Mr. Speaker, we got a rare example of what real courage looks like, and it almost brought me to tears. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago, it did bring me to tears. We don't often get to watch a 10-year-old girl stare down the Minister of Education, but we got that opportunity today. She has a right to an education just like every other kid in this province, and she said so. She has a right to a future just like every other kid in the province. She's the one who said that today to the Minister of Education. This little girl is 10 years old and already she's a hero.

It's a privilege every day to come to work in this place. It's a privilege every day to have the people of your community entrust you with their issues and voice them here in the Legislature. Every once in a while, you have one of those moments that reminds you of why you wanted to be here in the first place. Someone or something comes to your attention that reminds you that what goes on in this place has the potential to give someone a brighter future or, what we're seeing from the government, to take that future away.

Speaker, today is our opportunity to give my little friend Lexi a bright future. Today is our opportunity to tell the government that these are more than just schools. These are places that change the lives of students who have nowhere else to turn. It's nothing short of malpractice on our part if we don't speak up for these students and tell the government that these kids shouldn't have to exist year to year wondering whether or not the school is going to exist or whether the funding is going to come their way.

It was amazing to watch the government respond this morning during question period, Mr. Speaker. First, we had the Premier trying to take credit for a one-year reprieve for schools that never should have been on the chopping block in the first place. Then we had the Minister of Education tell us that the consultations had only recently concluded but that they would be ongoing as the minister met with more people.

My colleague the member from Windsor West, whose motion we're now debating, then revealed to the House that the minister was originally supposed to be discussing staff impacts this spring after the decision was made.

1520

We always stated that the endgame here was to close these schools and the consultations were just for show, and I believe that further consultations are just another show. The minister just decided to blow some more taxpayer money by giving the consultants a second booking in this process. There was no original intent by the government to keep these schools open. They decided to do it yesterday to try to short-circuit the demonstrations that were planned here at the Legislature.

That's why, for the first time in this entire process, the government talked about new legislation around students with learning disabilities in question period today. Speaker, kids like Lexi deserve more than solutions made up on the fly, around a kitchen table or on the back of a napkin. We've seen far too many policies developed that way in the last couple of days. The minister and the government know this.

Kids with learning disabilities, educated at demonstration schools, have gone on to remarkable careers. They're physicists, doctors, lawyers; they've gone to MIT, Cornell, Queen's, McGill; they've had great success. These schools change lives. They save lives and provide hope. If we are in no other business in this place, let it be that one. Let us be in the business of giving kids hope, who are often looking for it wherever they can find it.

I've had the opportunity to visit Sagonaska a couple of different times and meet the students there. I want to read a couple of the messages that were sent to me by the kids. They wrote on the back of these cards what Sagonaska school means to them.

The first one is from Kayla Steven. She's 14. "Sagonaska has given me confidence in myself and has made me a better reader. I've made friends for life thanks to Sagonaska."

Jackson: "Sagonaska
"—helped me read better

- “—helped me learn to swim better
- “—helped me learn to self-advocate
- “—learned to play the guitar
- “—learned to use my tech better
- “—helped me improve my social skills.”

Janine, who is 14: “Sagonaska is really important to me. It’s basically my home. Sagonaska helped me in many ways. I started at a grade 1 reading level and now I am at a grade 7 reading level.”

These are real kids in our communities, Mr. Speaker. They wanted me to pass on their messages here today.

I’d just like to thank those again who are here to advocate for the school, and I really want to say that this one is for Lexi. Thank you all for being here.

Government: Do the right thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think this is probably one of the most inspiring motions I have had the pleasure to contribute to in debate in this House, in my short memory here.

The potential of this motion, Speaker—it talks about this minister wanting to close schools. We’re saying that we want to make sure we get a commitment from this minister to keep provincial schools and demonstration schools across this province open.

I want to express my pride in the efforts of my colleague from Windsor West, who has done a fantastic job opposing this unfair and highly damaging course of action. New Democrats know that the government may need to make some tough decisions because they have to make up for billions of misspent tax dollars. But the government can’t balance the books on the backs of vulnerable kids with highly specialized needs.

Robarts School for the Deaf and the Amethyst Demonstration School in London have been providing students with severe learning disabilities with quality, highly specialized educational services for decades. Provincial and demonstration schools are vital to exceptional-needs students in Ontario. These kids often fall through the cracks in the system. It’s this program that catches them and provides them with the equal opportunity to thrive like their peers in district schools. The unique educational experiences offered at these schools have a lasting impact. Perhaps the government is simply not aware of the true value of the Amethyst and Robarts schools and all the provincial demonstration schools across this province. That’s what we are here to point out today. We’re here to tell the minister what the value of these schools are and what it means to keep them open.

As I mentioned before, Speaker, students thrive and succeed in programs that adapt to their specific needs in small classes with highly specialized curricula, and these kids make improvements in leaps and bounds in an incredibly short period of time.

I have to stress the critical, fundamental importance of the environment at Robarts and Amethyst, including the residential setting, to these students’ success. That cannot be reduplicated in home schools. The residential segment of the educational environment is a complement to the

success of these students. Robarts and Amethyst take a holistic, immersive approach to individualized educational programs, which include the need for residence at the school. The residential component—I can’t stress enough—builds leadership, advocacy, assertiveness and life skills for these students.

While we are pleased this week to hear that these families’ pleas for the schools’ continued existence have triggered the reopening of enrolment for the upcoming school year, that is just a small part of what we’re asking in this motion. We’re asking for the government and this minister to commit to keeping these schools open.

If you want to talk about evidence-based research, Speaker, here it is in the gallery. We have students who are here; we have alumni; we have parents, grandparents and friends, all here supporting this evidence-based educational program offered at these provincial schools.

I just want to finish off by saying that we need to have these schools stay open. I support this motion. I hope the minister here today is going to stand up and do the right thing and support this motion not to close provincial and demonstration schools.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. It’s great to see you in the chair this afternoon.

I want to begin by thanking the parents from across the province, including those from Leeds–Grenville, who made the trip to Queen’s Park today. In particular, I want to recognize the tremendous work of a constituent of mine, Lesley Lehman. She has been a passionate, tireless advocate and leader in rallying support for these schools.

Let’s be clear: Without the work of Lesley and the other parents who are here today, the Minister of Education wouldn’t have backed down yesterday. You should all take some pride in that fact, but I think we all know—everyone in this chamber and everyone in the galleries today—that our work is not finished. You didn’t go through hell these past several months for a one-year reprieve, only to have to do it again next year.

I’ve heard from so many parents who have already shared their deeply personal stories about schools like Sagonaska, as my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings talked about earlier, and what that school has meant to their families. We’ve learned over the past month or so the amazing difference that these programs, and the teachers and staff who deliver them, have made.

Personally, Speaker, I can’t comprehend any government—any government—that would want to shut those down. But make no mistake, that was the plan. That was the government’s plan. That’s why I think the vote today will be very instructional. We’re going to find out soon if yesterday’s announcement was in fact to deflect from today’s rally. If this government is truly committed to these remarkable programs and these incredible students, then some members across will join us in supporting the motion from the member for Windsor West.

I will be watching closely. I know the folks in the galleries will be watching closely. We want to support

you today, and we want to support the member for Windsor West.

1530

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is an honour for me to rise today, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to speak to this motion that was brought forward by the member from Windsor West.

It was important for me to speak to this motion for two reasons. First, the motion refers to six schools in the province of Ontario. Two of those schools are located in my community of London: Robarts School for the Deaf and Amethyst Demonstration School.

Second, like the member for Windsor West, I served as a school board trustee. I served for 13 years on the Thames Valley District School Board. I recognize the importance of programs that address the unique educational needs of students.

I want to thank all the parents who have advocated so hard on behalf of the students across the province who are going to be affected by the potential closure of these schools, because it is their efforts that have led to this temporary reprieve. Hopefully, we will get the government to reverse the decision completely.

However, what those parents have done by organizing these kinds of protests, by organizing rallies, is that they have made their voices heard. When I attended the rally in London on March 31, I talked to students. I talked to students who had been failed by our mainstream educational system but who had gone on to incredible success at Amethyst school. By closing that school and other demonstration schools in the province, we are denying these students the opportunity to achieve their full potential—the potential that we know that they are capable of, because we've seen the success that they have gone on to achieve.

When I went to that rally, I also talked to teachers. I was chair of the special education committee in my school board. I know that we benefited from teachers who taught at the demonstration schools and applied new strategies and learned new things that they were then able to take back into mainstream classrooms. So there was a real synergy, a real exchange of best practice, that benefits all students in the province but particularly the students who are at the demonstration schools.

I also talked to counsellors, students and parents who told me about the importance of these residential schools in dealing with the whole child, and the kinds of relationships that were formed, the bonds that were created—that last a lifetime, quite frankly—between the staff who work at the residential schools and the students who attend there.

I hear the minister talk about the fact that this is not about money. Well, quite frankly, that feeds into the cynicism that Ontarians feel about politics and politicians, when they hear things like that. We know that the Drummond report identified the closure of these schools as a way to meet the province's fiscal targets. We know that the Drummond commission was established

specifically to find cost savings, and this was one of the strategies.

I really commend the member for Windsor West. I hope that everybody in this House will support this motion today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais commencer par remercier tous ceux qui sont venus aujourd'hui apporter leur voix dans ce débat. Ça me fait toujours plaisir quand les gens prennent l'opportunité de venir ici à Queen's Park et de nous dire ce que ça va vouloir dire dans leur vie à eux.

Laissez-moi vous parler un petit peu du Centre Jules-Léger. C'est la seule école provinciale à accueillir des élèves provenant des 12 conseils scolaires de langue française. Ils font ça depuis 35 ans. Le Centre Jules-Léger, c'est deux écoles, une école primaire et secondaire, c'est des résidences, c'est des services consultatifs—ils ont plus de 400 enfants francophones à travers tous les conseils scolaires—c'est aussi un module, une classe pour les élèves sourds et aveugles.

À Jules-Léger, on retrouve les écoles d'application pour les élèves ayant des troubles sévères d'apprentissage, l'école provinciale pour les élèves sourds et malentendants, le programme préscolaire et préparatoire en surdité, les services consultatifs pour les 12 conseils, le programme résidentiel pour les élèves, la langue des signes québécoise, le plan d'enseignement individualisé, les équipes multidisciplinaires, etc.

On parle d'enfants qui ont des capacités intellectuelles suffisantes pour apprendre mais qui ont de la difficulté à apprendre. Ils ont un trouble d'apprentissage. Lorsqu'ils se rendent à l'école Jules-Léger, finalement ils sont capables d'apprendre. On traite, chez l'enfant, la difficulté d'apprentissage. Il y a des techniques spécialisées en psychosociolinguistique et en neurolinguistique. L'enfant apprend à apprendre, et ça change leur vie au complet.

I'd like to thank Mrs. Sharon Gorman, who came to see me about this. She gave me the example of the Amyotte family from my riding. Both parents and both kids have a severe learning disability, but because the daughter was able to go to one of the provincial schools, she's driving. She is a truck driver for one of the big construction companies in Sudbury. She has a good job and a pension plan. She can sustain her family. She has learned to read enough so that she can have a driver's licence and pass all of the courses so that she can go on to all of the mine sites. There are so, so many success stories like this, but all of this is in trouble.

Pourquoi? Parce qu'on a un gouvernement qui a décidé qu'on ne pouvait plus accepter d'étudiants dans ces écoles-là et un gouvernement qui a décidé qu'il ferait une consultation—mais ce n'est pas une consultation qu'il faisait. Ce qu'il faisait vraiment, c'était de se trouver des excuses pour fermer les écoles, mettre les gens à pied et sauver de l'argent.

Je ne peux pas croire qu'en 2016, on aurait un gouvernement qui n'aurait tellement pas de cœur qu'il serait capable de faire quelque chose comme ça. Parce

que tous ces gens-là sont venus à Queen's Park pour dire à leur gouvernement, « Ne faites pas ça », le gouvernement a reculé d'un pas. Ils ont dit qu'ils ne le feront pas pour cette année. Mais ce n'est pas assez. Il faut s'assurer que ces écoles, comme le Centre Jules-Léger, seront là pour l'année prochaine et pour toutes les années à venir.

J'espère que les voix de tous les gens qui sont ici ont été entendues. Merci d'être venus.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm going to commend the member for Windsor West for bringing this forward, and my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings for his very passionate remarks moments ago.

I'm going to make four points, if I can, as somebody who has just been around a while, seen a lot of things come and go and had a few experiences in my own life in this area. I just think that the more choice we can give people, particularly parents, the better off we are. I know that there are complexities around education—there's a long history—but surely we should be putting more choices on the table instead of taking them away.

Secondly, I just think that when it comes to issues, particularly education and health care, parents make well-informed decisions about what's in their kids' best interests. I trust parents far more than bureaucrats or government officials to make the call for where their kid goes to school. If you heard the Minister of Education, between the lines what she's saying is that these schools aren't good for kids and that they should be brought into these other schools and we should close them down and build new. When it comes to that judgment call, I'm going to trust the parents to make the right call for their kids, not the government.

The buildings we have, like Sick Kids and demonstration schools and provincial schools—we're glad we have them, but you never want to use them. So when parents make that choice, they're doing so because they've invested the time and they know their kid is going to have the best chance of succeeding if they get those special services. The culture that develops—staff isn't staff; staff is a family—and the support of the other kids.

My daughter went to Holland Bloorview. Thank God she did. If they were closing that school down, I would fight like hell—like these parents are doing here today—to make sure it stayed open for the next generation of kids so that they can succeed. Sometimes immersion won't work. Sometimes parents will rightly say, "They're not ready yet." Sometimes parents will rightly say, "I don't trust you because when I look at the other schools, they're cutting EAs today"—including the one in my daughter's class. It's gone. It makes it harder, Speaker. Good for the parents who are fighting, and good for my colleagues in this caucus and that one. Let's see what these guys do. I believe in preserving that choice for parents to help their kids get an even brighter future.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the member from Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. I only have 19 seconds. I thank the member from Windsor West for bringing this motion forward and I can tell you that on this side of the House it's not about money. It's not about dollars. It's about providing the best outcome for our children.

I'll tell you what it shouldn't be about, Speaker. It should not be about cheap partisan politics. It should not be about exploitation of the parents. It should be about our students.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return back to the member from Windsor West for the wrap-up.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I think it's really unfortunate that the member from Durham decided to take this discussion in that direction. I would just like to—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I already reminded some of you: no crosstalking, okay?

I'm going to return to the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: In the two minutes I have left, or now a minute and a half, I just want to point out that I know as a trustee, the member from Durham who was a trustee knows, the Minister of Education knows and the Premier knows—they were all trustees—that when it comes to the education sector, everything is based on funding that comes from the government. Every decision is based on funding that comes from the government.

The minister talks about declining enrolment at these schools. These schools have an average capacity of 120 to 150 kids who can live in residence at these schools. The government has capped enrolment at 40 students. They have caused this problem, not the families, not the children and not the community members that support this. The government has caused the problem by capping enrolment. They've created the case to close these schools. When they capped enrolment, it decreased the funding that flows to these schools directly for programming—the very argument that the minister is making.

The minister knows better as a former trustee. When she cites declining enrolment and the funding isn't there for programming, she knows better. They created this problem. It's their time to fix it, to make it right. Stand up to all the families here today—those in this room, those in the overflow rooms and the families at home—and tell them that you support them, that you understand the importance of the schools, that you understand the importance of their children's future and that you are going to do the right thing. Don't stand up here and string them along any longer.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act / Projet de loi 168, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration financière.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really happy today to debate my private member's bill, the Capping Ontario's Debt Act. At the outset, I want to say to the MPPs that this is nothing new in North America or across the world. Kenya, Poland, Denmark, Alberta, all three Canadian territories and the United States have a debt cap bill in their jurisdictions.

It's no secret that I'm deeply concerned with our growing debt in this province. Ontario is the most indebted province or state in the world, so it's obvious this is a real issue. There are many reasons why I think we need to take our skyrocketing debt seriously and introduce a debt cap as an additional measure of accountability.

In the limited time I have today, I will do my best to explain why this new measure I'm introducing is so important. Fundamentally, this bill is about protecting future generations while holding politicians of all political stripes accountable for the dollars that they spend. The technical details of what this bill would do if enacted is to provide that the crown is not authorized to raise money by way of loan or to receive money through the issue and sale of securities if the effect of doing so would cause Ontario's net debt to exceed 45% of its GDP. Our debt would be capped at 45% of GDP.

The budget passed by the Liberal government will push our debt to over \$300 billion for the first time in our history. In just nine years, this government has driven Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio from 27% to about 40%, a whopping 48% increase. With a high burden of debt, we are less able to respond to financial crises, leaving the families and businesses of this province vulnerable.

Right now, interest rates are extremely low, but they're not always going to be this low. Our debt represents a huge liability if those rates go up or if our credit rating is downgraded even further. Even now, our debt servicing costs divert funds away from other programs.

I brought forward this bill because I believe the public deserves greater accountability. The people of this province understand we're in a poor financial situation, but they don't see a real plan from this government on how to deal with it. They're seeing irresponsible spending on scandals and incompetence, like SAMS; the gas plants; \$5 billion in corporate welfare every year; paying to get rid of excess electricity—too many blunders to name here. Then they're seeing cuts to services they depend on, like health care and education, and there's no end in sight.

The Liberal government has tried to frame the conversation around our growing debt to make it as flattering as possible for themselves. For seven years in a row, they've created artificially high projections for the deficit, and lo and behold, each year they beat the target

they created. In fact, I'm sure we will be hearing about that a few times this afternoon.

They say they are on track to balance the budget, but the Auditor General has been clear that "net debt and total debt are both expected to continue growing in absolute terms even after the province starts to run annual budget surpluses. This important fact should not go unnoticed by members of the Legislature and the public."

The government is also relying, in their budget, on extraordinarily optimistic revenue numbers. In that document, they project that revenues will grow at a rate of 4.6% between now and 2019, and at a rate of 5% for the next three years. This includes 7% revenue growth over the next year alone. Meanwhile, the Financial Accountability Officer is also optimistic but still projects only 3.3% revenue growth over three years. So the government says 4.6% and the FAO says 3.3%, while the real revenue growth since 2008 has only averaged 2.6%. The scary thing is that it's unlikely that they will even achieve the numbers that they've set out.

While the government may be able to use such tactics to successfully change the conversation of the day, they won't change the reality of the balance sheet. Our debt is continuing to grow. Thirty years ago, the provincial debt was a manageable \$31.5 billion. Nine years ago, it had grown to \$153 billion. Today, it has doubled to our current \$308 billion.

The people of Ontario are already feeling the consequences of this reckless fiscal management. Even with historically low rates, Ontario spends almost \$1 billion every month just to service the debt. Just as the Auditor General warned, this cost is crowding out critical programs and services.

This week, and today, we have seen many distraught parents in this House and rallying outside, justifiably upset to be threatened with the loss of vital services for their children. As a father myself, I find this unimaginable. Demonstration schools and autism services for children over five years old are on the chopping block because of this government's poor financial management. We can't allow our children and the vulnerable to pay endlessly for the waste and scandal we've witnessed under this Liberal government.

We have a duty to legislate with the good of our children and our children's children in mind. A debt cap certainly won't solve this issue, but it would serve as a safeguard to make the government more accountable. If we reach a level of debt on the threshold of 45% of GDP, the government would have to return to this House and answer to the people of this province for their decisions.

1550

This government has done their best to keep the public from having a real conversation about government spending and priorities. We saw that clearly with the introduction of the budget before the report on pre-budget consultations had ever been written. It's also clear from the lack of disclosure in how this government is spending taxpayers' money.

Despite the barriers this government has put up against meaningful engagement, the people of this province are

eager to have their voices heard. In support of this bill, I've been touring around the province and engaging online with people from across Ontario to discuss why and how we need to tackle the debt. From Ottawa to Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and the GTA, and of course a few visits to Sarnia–Lambton, people were eager to share their thoughts on how we can get Ontario back in the black. Rather than sitting down at my kitchen table on a Saturday evening to draft up a plan, I went out to meet with economists, businesses owners, parents, community activists, young professionals, students and think tanks. On this Back in the Black tour, we discussed a broad range of ideas to make life more affordable in Ontario, get rid of barriers to productivity, and get our province growing again.

I heard loud and clear that the Drive Clean program and the death tax are seen as nothing more than a shakedown. People want these programs gone. With the costs of administering and enforcing these bad initiatives, the province would be further ahead by doing away with them.

I spoke with real estate agents and current and aspiring homeowners. They brought forward suggestions to make it easier to buy and sell a home in this province, such as capping property tax at inflation and eliminating the land transfer tax.

Taxes were something I heard about over and over again anywhere in the province. There is a feeling that our tax code is outdated and overly complex. One idea that I heard was to immediately form a committee charged with bringing forward recommendations and a sensible plan to begin modernizing, simplifying and flattening Ontario's tax code. I also heard that we should be looking at shifting the tax burden from income to consumption.

I also heard time and time again about the ORPP. Both businesses owners and employees are deeply concerned that the ORPP is going to impact them personally and about the money it's going to pull out of the economy overall.

As I mentioned earlier, corporate welfare is another issue that really has people upset. They want their government creating the conditions for businesses to succeed by focusing on the basics—affordable energy, investing in infrastructure and balancing Ontario's budget—not handing out money in secret without qualification criteria or tracking of results. We have over \$300 billion of debt. Handing out \$5 billion annually, mostly to private, profitable corporations, is disgraceful when services for autistic children are being crowded out by the budget crunch this government has created themselves.

Speaker, I won't get into all the issues discussed on this tour because I simply don't have enough time. But I want to encourage the party across the aisle, the government, in the strongest terms possible to revisit their approach of top-down governance and listen to the people of Ontario. People want a strong, stable economy that represents their priorities. Not only are they being left out of the conversation by the Liberals; they are having their

futures compromised by a government that won't take responsibility for its poor financial decisions. A debt cap would help protect future generations while holding politicians accountable for the dollars that they spend.

While the majority of feedback I've heard on this bill so far has been extremely positive, there is one critique that has come up, and that is, if we're going to have a debt cap, it should be lower than 45% of GDP. I have to say I absolutely agree. I would love to cap the debt at 40% or 42% of GDP. Unfortunately, with the Liberal track record on racking up debt and the nature of a majority government, it seemed even a debt cap as high as 45% would be unlikely to get enough support to pass. Reaching a level of debt equivalent to 45% of GDP warrants a thoughtful public discussion and marks a point at which serious measures of accountability for policy-makers should be in place. This cap is the least we should do, and it absolutely should be done.

To be honest, I'm not expecting much from the government on this bill. Our provincial debt sits at over \$300 billion, and it's obvious that they haven't any ideas on how to fix it besides burning the furniture to heat the house. I've heard loud and clear, and I'm sure all the members have as well, whether it be sky-high hydro bills, lack of a good job and sufficient income to make ends meet, or the ever-increasing cost of living for things like food and transportation, that for many in this province, times are very tough. Thanks to our \$308-billion provincial debt, it's going to get tougher and tougher as we go along.

We can't keep going down this road of endless borrowing. If the government is serious about getting a handle on the debt, they should welcome this measure and support my private member's bill, Bill 168.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to address this private member's bill. I have to say, Speaker, that I don't have much, beyond this bill that's in my hand, to go with. I appreciate the commentary from the member defending his bill.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There's a lot, actually, that we have to untangle here, notwithstanding the helpful comments from the minister from St. Catharines over there.

First of all, I don't think anyone can defend the Liberal financial record. I'm certainly not going to try for a moment. The only thing I would agree with, with regard to the member who spoke before me, was that right now, we're in a situation of relatively low interest rates, and if rates spring up, then, yes, we are going to have substantial problems.

But I also have to say I listened to some of the recommendations that were made, and they remind me—because I had the opportunity, maybe the misfortune, to study Canadian history at York University, and I remember the ideas of R.B. Bennett. Beyond Canadian history, I remember the ideas of Herbert Hoover. The idea that you could have flat taxes, that you would shift

the burden from those who had higher incomes to those who had lower incomes, has never made sense in terms of the economics of an advanced society. The idea that you would end a land transfer tax, that you would want to move away from income taxes to consumption taxes, essentially is an effort to wipe out a whole century of work to try and finance the operation of an advanced industrial society that we've developed through some very painful processes.

Income tax came into Canada during the First World War because the price of fighting for freedom and for the survival of this country in the face of aggression—something that was repeated in World War II—the price of that fight was ensuring there was enough income to allow the society to mobilize its resources to defend itself and to defend those values that it believed in. Income tax was needed because those who are wealthy are in a position to contribute more. Those who have very little, can't.

Frankly, Speaker, in a society where wealthy people become wealthy because of an infrastructure that exists—I'll tell you, you're not very wealthy in a society that has no roads. You're not wealthy in a society that doesn't have universities, doesn't have bridges, doesn't have communications—all of those things supported, to a greater or lesser extent, by the society as a whole. Wealthy people may have more in a society than others, but they benefit profoundly from the infrastructure that all of us pay for. And to the extent that they've benefited far more generously than the bulk of the population, they should be putting more into the kitty.

If we're talking about debt relief, debt problems, dealing with Ontario's ongoing deficit, we should look at the distribution of income in this country. Some 20% of the population has half the income; 80% of the population has the other half. Who can afford to pay the taxes that need to be paid to ensure we have roads, hospitals, schools, bridges etc.?

Some 70% of the assets in this society reside with the top 20%, and 30% are with the bottom 80%. Again, who has the assets, and who can afford to actually pay the money that's needed to run this society?

When you come to this House and you rail about the debt, and yet you have a party that has styled itself as the tax fighter; when you decide to cut your revenue—the Liberals have done this. In the past, they have cut corporate income tax rates, and that, Speaker, as you are well aware, has led to dead money, money sitting in the vaults of corporations, not used for productive investment, not used to employ people; rather, it's simply to make sure that the bottom lines are as fat as possible. That's not a responsible approach, and yet, that's actually the framework that wraps around this bill.

1600

I don't defend the Liberals. I think they're not good governors. I think there is no question that the hits we've seen for autistic children, the hits we've seen against the provincial schools—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. I already reminded the government side. This is the third time. I know that some colourful language is used by the member from Toronto–Danforth; I just want to remind the government side that this is the third time. I'm going to start warning individual members.

I'm going to return to the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, if you propose a series of policies that make it impossible for you to actually raise the revenue to run your society in a way that makes it economically sustainable, prosperous, just and peaceful, and you say you're going to limit debt, then you've proposed an economic Rube Goldberg machine that will not work. It's a construct that doesn't do justice to the people of this province and really has no intellectual coherence whatsoever.

If we want a strong, stable economy, I think it makes sense to raise corporate taxes so that we have the money to pay for the things we need. We need to preserve progressive taxation so that those who have the most pay the most and those who have the least pay the least, and you have a distribution of burden according to people's ability to carry it. When you say you're going to put a cap on debt without actually addressing the revenue side of the problem, that does not work, and frankly, it undermines the society.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is indeed a pleasure to follow my colleague from Toronto–Danforth.

Let's see if I can encapsulate the neo-conservative vision for Ontario that the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has outlined with this Tea Party, anti-growth, retrograde idea that does not deserve the support of this or any other Legislature.

The member believes that Ontario's best days happened decades ago. Like his former federal cousins, the member's bill says to Ontarians, "This is who you are. This is all you'll ever be. This is the size of your economy. These are your economic prospects." If you believe the often-debunked premise of the member's bill, Ontario will never grow beyond those limits. Our people will never become smarter or more productive, no new industries will ever change our province or enhance our prosperity, and therefore we must never, ever borrow past his back-of-the-envelope, arbitrary debt limit. If that makes the premise of the member's bill sound foolish, it is because the premise of the member's bill truly is foolish.

Similar arbitrary, unnecessary and downright stupid laws in the United States, from which this bill has been lifted in cut-and-paste fashion, have seen both the US House of Representatives and the Senate shut down for weeks at a stretch while bitterly partisan debates raged over whether or not the world's largest economy will agree to pay its own bills.

This bill is the product of an austerity strategy that has been a failure everywhere it has been tried, every time it

has been tried. Austerity leaves every economy that dances with this cobra deeper in debt and further behind economically. Austerity is, however, what the Ontario Tea Party Conservatives have been selling for more than 20 years. It was a flop when they were in government, leaving the province with a \$5.6-billion structural debt. It was a flop for the federal Conservative government, which squandered Canada's biggest-ever budget surplus and plunged it into a debt from which they never recovered.

The premise of the member's bill is an ongoing flop in the United States, which took fully three years longer than Ontario to emerge from the 2008-09 recession. And it is a continuing flop in Europe, where even now the European Union teeters on the brink of recession.

You cannot implement wholesale budget cuts across interlinked economies unless the private sector is growing and generating taxation revenue. If everybody is cutting, then who is left to save or spend? Yet this bill allows for no alternative but budget cuts, program cuts and pushing homeowners and businesses into bankruptcy.

Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is lower than most Canadian households'. Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is currently about 38% and headed down, well below the member's proposed ceiling of 42%. Canada's household debt-to-income ratio is at its highest-ever level, at about 160%.

Between 1995 and 2003, Ontarians learned never, ever to trust Conservatives with money. Previous Conservative governments in the 1960s and 1970s have, however, built this province by borrowing to invest in growth.

The number of budget surpluses run by the Robarts and Davis administrations combined: zero.

The number of budget surpluses run by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals: three in their first six years, before the recession started, and a balanced budget is forecast in the next fiscal year.

Do we want our Legislature locked in fruitless partisan debates to shut down the public service and essential services every few years? American voters and their state representatives know how truly stupid that is.

The final nail in this bill's coffin should be from the people who are actually qualified to pass judgment on Ontario's debt, which—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The member for Mississauga–Streetsville is using very, very unparliamentary language, in my opinion. He's using words that are very insulting to the opposition. I would ask you to ask him to withdraw some of those unparliamentary remarks, if you agree.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to remind the member from Mississauga–Streetsville to tone down the colourful language, because some of the choice words you used are quite inflammatory. I just want to remind the member.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. We will always be hard on the idea but always gentle with the people.

The final nail in the bill's coffin should be from the people who are actually qualified to pass judgment on Ontario's debt, which lifted this province out of the recession without the wholesale layoffs seen in the USA and Europe.

Moody's bond rating service said, "Ontario's 2016 Budget Stays on Track to Balanced Budgets."

The Dominion Bond Rating Service said that the 2016 budget's "economic momentum keeps" the "fiscal plan on track."

Institutionalized budget debate gridlock? No, thank you. This bill richly deserves to be defeated.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations again on your recent appointment.

We want to get this debate back on track after that six or seven or so minutes. You know what, Speaker? It was just last week that I stood before this House to discuss the looming black cloud hanging over this province: Ontario's crippling debt. Truth be told, I find it rather unfortunate that in fact I have to stand here yet again, weekly, simply because the Liberal government keeps making the same fiscal mistakes over and over and over again.

The reality is this, Speaker: We are in severe debt—\$308 billion in debt. So as unfortunate as it is that I have to stand here and discuss this issue again, this discussion is worth having. Tangible solutions to ensure things do not get worse are absolutely necessary.

Although 308 billion is a large number—it's almost too large to wrap your head around—my colleague's bill could not be any simpler. Let me break down its numbers for you: It's roughly four sentences long. It asks for one amendment. It gets straight to the point, and so will I.

What we are asking for today is that the government of the day, whoever it is, not be allowed to take out a loan if it would then cause Ontario's debt to exceed 45% of its GDP. To get even more to the point, we're asking for a debt cap, a cap on our debt. That is it. That is all. Period.

Today, I am proud to stand with my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and speak in favour of his bill, which demands a credible plan to balance the books and pay down the debt. It puts the Premier and her government on a firm credit limit on behalf of everyone we represent, and everyone they represent: the Ontario taxpayer.

1610

The fact is that this year, according to the Wynne government's own projections, interest on debt payments will cost Ontario taxpayers a billion dollars every single month—a billion dollars. This government's fiscal mismanagement means more spending to pay down more debt interest. It means that nine cents out of every tax

dollar collected in revenue by the provincial government is being spent on interest payments.

On that note, let's talk about those interest rates and why my colleague's bill is so timely. An important fact to consider is that at this moment, interest rates are at a historically low level. A return to more normal levels would jeopardize promises for balanced budgets. It would also increase the money this province spends on debt interest payments.

Speaker, the Fraser Institute conducted a projected analysis of this province's debt interest payments based on two scenarios. In both scenarios, interest rates we currently receive—which, again, are historically low—return to more normal levels.

The interest rate shocks described by scenario one, where rates rise from a baseline of 2.7% to 3.5% next year and up to 4.5% by 2019-20, would increase Ontario's projected deficit by \$264 million next year and would completely derail the Premier's campaign promise of balancing the budget by the 2018 election.

In the second scenario, where rates rise to 5% by 2020, Ontario's deficit would increase by \$616 million in the 2016-17 year, and the campaign promise of a balanced budget by 2018 would not only not be met—a broken promise—but would be replaced by an increased deficit of nearly \$1 billion.

In just four short years, Ontario's interest costs would rise by half a billion dollars in scenario one, and to almost \$1.2 billion in scenario two. Speaker, these scenarios are not unrealistic. Many economists are warning of an increase in overall interest rates in the near future. If we think that our current state of being the most indebted subnational borrower in the world is bad, we may only be seeing the tip of the iceberg. The reality is frightening. It's frightening to me as a member of this House, it's frightening to the people I represent and it's frightening to me as a father because it will be our children and our grandchildren who are paying for this government's fiscal mismanagement.

Speaker, my colleague's ask is simple. Everyone has a budget they have to live on. Everyone has to live within their means. We are simply asking this government to do the same. The situation is something like a teenager who has borrowed their parents' credit card without permission and gone overboard with spending. Consequently, that teenager needs to be reined in. They need to reflect on the poor choices they've made—emphasis on "poor," because that's what this province is right now.

Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's energy and efforts to bring this forward, and I thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm happy to be able to lend my voice to this debate this afternoon on An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act, basically capping the province's debt.

First of all, I would like to thank the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for bringing this bill forward. I believe that we would share many of the reasons he

brought this forward, because the current government's lack of fiscal management concerns us all. It concerns us all greatly.

They will say, "Well, what?" I would say "Well, a billion dollars on the gas plants didn't help anyone in this province—no one. Billions of dollars on P3 projects don't really help anyone." It costs a lot of money; it costs taxpayers money. This government is facing huge financial pressures because it lacks financial management. People are now starting to see it with the other issues we face today. They're cutting places where they shouldn't cut because they've got huge financial problems. I believe that I would share with the member that that's one of the reasons he is bringing this bill forward.

I don't support capping the debt at an arbitrary number for the simple reason that—and I don't hear too many people talk about this, and I am certainly no world financier, but I have a bit of a business background, and there is good debt and there is bad debt.

I always go back to farming, but if you spend money on something that's actually going to create wealth, or in a provincial background, something that's going to make the province better, and if you have to build up a long-term debt or mortgage to do that, it's like—

Hon. Jeff Leal: You buy a quota.

Mr. John Vanthof: A quota is a bit different, but it's like buying land.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: We're there, and that's something where you can build that debt up; then you can pay it off eventually and borrow more. It's like a business.

Where you get into trouble and where this province has big problems: Bad debt is when you need to buy a pickup truck, and a pickup truck is \$20,000, which is, let's say, \$500 a month. You decide that you could lease a Cadillac pickup truck for \$400 a month, but at the end of five years, you don't own anything. That's where they have problems, like with P3s.

That's why capping debt sometimes will create more problems: because in order to avoid that cap, governments can become very creative simply to avoid the cap, like they are now. They're promising to balance the budget and eliminate the deficit, and the government members won't agree when I say this, but one of the ways they're doing that is by selling Hydro One. That's one of the reasons why they're selling Hydro One: so they can meet their deficit targets.

A previous reiteration of the Progressive Conservative government, I do believe, sold or leased something called the 407 to balance their deficit. Right? That was them. Again, this budget—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. I've already reminded members that I do not want crosstalk. I've already reminded the government's members about the crosstalk and shouting across when the members opposite are debating on this bill. The next person I hear shouting across to the member finishing his remarks will be warned. I just want to be very clear: You will be warned.

The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I lost my train of thought, but I'll start with: current government, bad financial managers; opposition party, not much better.

But again, when you talk about a hard cap on debt: Sometimes you need to create debt to actually build things that the province needs. This isn't a good thing. What you need to strive for is a responsible government that actually spends taxpayers' money in responsible ways.

One thing I'd like to return to is that the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex said something about how he was thinking that one of the good ways to do it would be to turn taxes from income to consumption. I totally disagree with that, because that penalizes the poor, as has been done in the past, when everything is on consumption. But it surprised me, because Harper did the exact opposite when he cut the GST. So that confuses me.

But anyway, thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Barrie.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. It's always an honour to address the House, particularly when you're in the chair.

As the Minister of Finance announced, as part of this year's budget, Ontario is on track to responsibly manage our debt while growing the economy. This government remains committed to reducing our debt-to-GDP ratio to the pre-recession level of 27%. Yet this bill proposes that we allow as much as \$97 billion more to be added to the debt before the end of the decade.

It's clear to me that our government has a better plan for the province's economic future. As our net debt-to-GDP is projected to peak this year before entering a decline, our government is already abiding by an unwritten cap that is well below what has been proposed in this legislation. The minister's prudent financial management has kept the interest on debt payments below budget projections and at 8.9%, lower than in the 1990s and in the early 2000s under the NDP and Conservative governments.

1620

Madam Speaker, we have borrowed \$25 billion less than we had initially forecast. We have issued more bonds to lower interest rates. Rather than adding debt, we are on track to balance the budget by 2017-18. Our government is creating high-paying jobs that will only increase our tax base. We are investing strategically in modern infrastructure, cleaner energy, stronger health care, more affordable education and in growing rural communities. Our government has the responsible plan to grow our economy, a plan which does not include increasing the debt-to-GDP level.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to make three quick points to support my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex's resolution.

Number one: A single per cent increase in interest rates will cost us \$500 million on the money we've

already borrowed and spent. We know that interest rates are at historic lows. It is inevitable that they're going to go up, no doubt more than a simple 1%. What does 1% mean? What's \$500 million? That's more than we spend in the entire Ministry of the Environment. Think about the risk of irresponsible spending: That means that a single point of interest will cost us the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Labour—probably, 50 hospitals. Those are the sacrifices made by delaying action.

Number two: It's morally wrong to rob from the future to feed the present. The extraordinary burden we're putting on the backs of our kids and grandkids—we don't do that to our kids and grandkids. To win elections, to win the support of stakeholders, to assure another term, the government borrows at extraordinary levels, which is robbing the future to feed the present. I think it's morally wrong.

The third point I'll make is that when people lend us money, we pay it back—with interest. So think to yourself of the competitive impact this has. Whether it's Wall Street, China, New Zealand or Hong Kong, they use the money, plus interest, to invest in their universities, their transportation systems and to make their economies more competitive, to say they're open to the world. So not only are we handcuffing our children and our grandkids to a more challenging future because of debt levels, it's going to be harder for them to get a good job because the competitors will have a head start, financed by our own tax dollars. That's the perversity of all of this, Speaker: that we're actually advantaging our competitors, who will use the money that should be going to our infrastructure—it actually goes into theirs, at the end of the day, plus interest.

We all know that investors, when they're looking at jurisdictions, are loath to invest in heavily indebted nations or provinces or states. They're loath because they know that big debt levels mean future higher tax increases. It means that you cannot make steady, predictable investments in key infrastructure like transportation networks, like we're seeing in the province of Ontario, nor can you help out on the social services side.

As my colleague pointed out, there is no doubt in my mind—let me put it this way: Twice this week, we've seen parents of special-needs kids that have had to rally and protest at Queen's Park. They were screaming up there. Parents, who want no more than to spend time with their kids and see them get ahead, have got to go up there and scream. When you're spending \$10 billion a year on interest payments—imagine what that could do to help those parents and help their kids out. Lots of money for well-connected special interest groups; not so much for parents of special-needs kids. That's the impact of that indebtedness.

So congratulations to my colleague. I'd like to see a lower ceiling as well, but for starters, it's a great effort.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I am pleased to follow the member for West Lincoln because, when he was the

leader of the party, things were consistent. I've said this in the House a few times: You knew where he stood. The party was all about saving money. They were going to lay off 100,000 people in the province. People were angry about that, but you knew where he stood. Even though some of his caucus colleagues were trying to pull out from under, you knew exactly where he stood, and the Tory party was consistent. You've got the new leader now, and of course, to use this once again, they want to spend like Santa and save like Scrooge.

What you'll see this afternoon—I understood that former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was here today, speaking to the Tory caucus. Now, there was a man who knew what a deficit was, because the deficits were sky-high.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, no. It was a very high-deficit period of time under Brian Mulroney, because he knew that in order to expand the economy, in order to provide services, you had to make investments. He knew that.

I don't recall one balanced budget under the Progressive Conservative government when Bill Davis was Premier of this province. Was he reckless? Was he irresponsible? No. He understood that you needed the funds to be able to fund the programs that people wanted in this province.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Today, we will witness the Conservative Party voting for two motions—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I already reminded members there will be no cross-talking and shouting, okay? I wanted to remind the House leader for the third party: The next time I hear that shouting, you will be warned.

I return to the Chair of Cabinet.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The best motion this afternoon, in my view—the most relevant one—was from the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who wanted to see a new look taken at welfare in this province, at social assistance benefits, and he wanted to get an independent look at it.

What I'm pointing out is that every day in the House now—you never used to see this, except at the end of the question period—you see the Conservative Party get up, and the member who represents the Conservative Party, demanding that we save money, and then getting up with questions demanding that we spend money. They're totally inconsistent today.

The member who has brought forward the motion, Mr. McNaughton, I think is a fiscal conservative. I view him as that. He must shake when he sees one of his other members getting up to break the code—in other words, to say, "Spend more money on this; spend more money on that," constantly, while they are also calling for a reduction in expenditures and, of course, bringing down the debt and bringing down the deficit.

At least the New Democratic Party is not obsessed with the debt and deficit. Their former federal leader was,

and some of the party people were unhappy with that. Even the present leader had \$600 million of cuts in the budget—in the platform. But listen: They are consistent. I accept from the New Democratic Party the kind of motions they bring forward that call for expenditures, because that's what they believe in.

This crowd across from me believes in fiscal probity, and yet, day after day, they're getting up in the House and demanding that the government spend money. That's why I'm unable to vote for this straitjacket motion which came from the Republican Party of the United States this afternoon, even though I like the member personally.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm privileged this afternoon to speak on behalf of the people of Wellington–Halton Hills to express support for Bill 168, An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act, put forward in this House today by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. I think he deserves credit for bringing this forward. It's a bill that is important and merits the support of this House.

It's interesting to listen to the Liberal members, who apparently are going to be voting against this bill this afternoon. I don't want to prejudge, but their language and rhetoric have been actually over the top in terms of trashing this sensible motion.

The fact is, the government says that they are committed to reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio from its current level of about 40%, rounded off, and freezing it. Now, what is being proposed by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is to set a debt ceiling at 45% of debt to GDP, so I don't understand why the government would oppose it if they are truly sincere in their commitment to contain the debt-to-GDP ratio at 40%. When they took office, I believe it was in the 26% range, and it has gone up year after year.

I would contrast that to the record of the former Progressive Conservative government which held office between 1995 and 2003. As you know, those were difficult years in the early to mid-1990s. We had a recession and were coming out of it, and the new government inherited a massive provincial deficit. But once the deficit was paid down, we ran four consecutive balanced budgets. It's the last time that there has been any sort of fiscal discipline in the province of Ontario in terms of the administration of our government—four consecutive balanced budgets.

1630

Since that time, we have seen a Liberal government in power. We've seen, of course, when they took office in 2003, plans to spend the money. I believe program spending was going up between 7% and 8% and 9%, year after year after year. When we hit the recession, we were in real trouble, and the deficit ballooned very quickly.

It is correct that Ontario is the largest subnational debtor in the world. That should concern all of us—not just for ourselves, but for the next generation and the generations that follow us. I'm very, very concerned

about not just my kids but everybody's kids, who are going to be forced to pay ever-higher and increasing taxes just to service this massive debt.

What Mr. McNaughton is suggesting is that there has to be a limit. We have to put a limit on this. Apparently, government needs a limit in order to restrain the big spending plans of certain parties when they come to office.

I think I'd also add—and I think it's important to point out—that between the years of 1985, when the David Peterson government took office, through to 1990, and then from 1990 to 1995, the era of the NDP government, the Ontario debt tripled in its value, just in 10 years. It tripled under Liberal and NDP administrations.

What we need is a greater effort towards fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency. We certainly need more fiscal discipline, and that will be provided after the next election, with the election of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party.

In the meantime, we need to see legislation like this passed at second reading for further discussion, and we need this bill to pass and be sent to committee today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to wrap up.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the members from Toronto–Danforth, Mississauga–Streetsville—although he was a little harsh—St. Catharines, Wellington–Halton Hills, Kitchener–Conestoga—my colleagues, both of those members—Barrie, Timiskaming–Cochrane, and, of course, my friend from Niagara West–Glanbrook.

Bill 168, I think, would send the right message. One, it would bring accountability and transparency to the Legislature. I'm simply saying that if the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds 45%, all MPPs would have to come and vote on whether they want to extend that debt or limit it.

I've been on the record a number of times saying that I think it actually should be much, much lower than 45%. But a great conservative, in my view—Ronald Reagan—talked about half a loaf. I think this is half a loaf.

Government, regardless of political stripes, has to learn to set priorities. There is a disturbing trend, I think, that has been uncovered in the last couple of weeks, and it is around political donations and fundraising. That story, that was revealed in the National Post, I think should be deeply concerning to every MPP here, and that is this \$5-billion slush fund that's given out to the largest and oldest companies through a non-public-invitation forum. I'm talking, of course, about the business subsidies.

I guess my question would be for the government: Do you want to continue doling out \$5 billion through a non-public process, or would you rather set priorities and help the families that have kids with autism and help the families who are sending kids to demonstration schools?

Speaker, this is about priorities. Unfortunately, this Liberal government has none.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT
(SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH
COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES
SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES
(COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE
SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 30, standing in the name of Mr. Miller, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed to the motion will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will deal with the vote after the finish of the other business.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private member's notice of motion number 66. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will deal with the vote at the end of the other business.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1636 to 1641.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Would members please take your seats?

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT
(SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH
COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES
SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES
(COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE
SUR L' AIDE SOCIALE)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 185, an Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Moridi, Reza
Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia
Bailey, Robert	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Ballard, Chris	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Clark, Steve	Kiwala, Sophie	Sandals, Liz
Coe, Lorne	Leal, Jeff	Sattler, Peggy
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacLeod, Lisa	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Smith, Todd
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Taylor, Monique
Dickson, Joe	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
DiNovo, Cheri	Matthews, Deborah	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	McDonnell, Jim	Vernile, Daiene
Duguid, Brad	McGarry, Kathryn	Wilson, Jim
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Forster, Cindy	McMeekin, Ted	Yakabuski, John
Fraser, John	McNaughton, Monte	Yurek, Jeff
French, Jennifer K.	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 80; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is referred to—

Mr. Paul Miller: Regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee of Regulation and Private Bills? All those in favour? Agreed? Agreed.

Now we're going to open the door for 30 seconds.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private members' notice of motion number 66.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	Sattler, Peggy
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Singh, Jagmeet
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Coe, Lorne	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Martow, Gila	Taylor, Monique
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Vanthof, John
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras	Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor
Anderson, Granville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Moridi, Reza
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McGarry, Kathryn	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 36; the nays are 44.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We'll open the doors for 30 seconds again.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Bailey, Robert	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Clark, Steve	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Coe, Lorne	McNaughton, Monte	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick	
Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Gretzky, Lisa	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Hunter, Mitzie	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Jaczeq, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Delaney, Bob	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
DiNovo, Cheri	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Duguid, Brad	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor	
Forster, Cindy	McMeekin, Ted	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 61.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Dhillon assumes ballot item number 34 and Mr. Takhar assumes ballot item number 41, Mrs. McGarry assumes ballot item number 33 and Mr. Crack assumes ballot item number 70.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2016, on the motion for 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 Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I have a few comments to say as somebody who was very involved in municipal politics before I even thought of getting involved in provincial politics, let alone being a candidate or even winning in provincial politics.

There are a lot of people who have a lot of concerns. I did go around and speak to some of my volunteers and some of the people who used to go to city of Vaughan council meetings—I was a bit of a regular fixture for a little while when there were issues going on—and people who were really up to date on what's going on in terms of how elections are run and things like that. When I mentioned this bill, they unanimously said to me, "Well, this must be about ensuring that we have electronic voting." They felt that that was the most modern thing we could do for our municipal elections: make sure that people can vote electronically from their computers, from the convenience of their work, their school or their home.

But that really doesn't seem to be the focus of this bill, and I think it's something that we do need to discuss here at length. I know there are a lot of people who are concerned about voter fraud and electronic glitches and things like that, but I think the fact that the traffic and the congestion have gotten so much worse in the GTA has made it very difficult for some people who have a long commute to be able to vote. Not everybody is that organized or that prepared or that knowledgeable to know that they can register to vote in advance, by mail, in many circumstances, or they can just go to the returning officer and vote in advance in various ways. Most people like to vote on election day, even if they're aware of advance voting, because they don't want to decide till the last second. They figure that there could be a scandal the day before the election, and they want to be able to cast their ballot that day, and you can understand that.

During a two-minute comment on this bill yesterday, I spoke about the elected chair for York region because that's something people in York region who really care and are interested in the political process feel very strongly about. I think that would move York region to be more modern and more democratic. I'm very disappointed that even though it was a government MPP from York region who put forward that private member's bill, his own government seems to be stalling it. You have to ask yourself a few questions: Why? What pressure is this government seeing from some of the elected officials, regional councillors and mayors in York region who like the fact that they get to choose the chair rather than the collective democratic voting process?

We heard a lot of discussion, as well, about the registration date being moved from January 1 to May 1 and how that would somehow shorten the campaign process. But we're also moving up the last date. So it's a shorter process if someone files on the first date—for a candidate who files on the first date every election. But if a candidate always files on the last date, it lengthens the campaign period, which actually may be a little fairer.

After all, a lot of voters have campaign fatigue. People certainly don't want to see election signs up for as long as they often have to see them, and we all know there are a lot of complaints about that.

There's a \$100 cost to register. I see pros and cons. We want it to be inexpensive enough that it isn't a detriment for somebody who wants to file as a candidate. On the other hand, it's a very cheap way to get your name out there and just advertise whatever business you're in—if you're in printing, in real estate. I have a feeling that a lot of candidates in municipal elections have no intention of winning. They just figure that for \$100—talk about advertising. I can put my signs up everywhere. I can get interviewed in the newspaper and get my picture put up in a few places and, bingo, it's great for business. That's an unfortunate part of having it be so cheap.

There's a lot of discussion about ranked ballots. I have found that it's almost up there with religion in terms of discussing difficult topics with people. As somebody who went through a recount, I'm very concerned about how that process would work. I'm very concerned that ranked balloting would make it very difficult. For some of the candidates on either end of the spectrum, it will make it almost impossible for them.

My last comment is on the online voters list, which I would like to see. Right now, in Vaughan—I don't know about other municipalities—we're given a voters list on a CD or it's printed, and we have to sign a form that says we will return it and not save that information. I just wonder if there's a better electronic system for people to access online—you can't download it, but you can just view it, and you can write it out manually somewhere, which people could manually do with a CD, I guess; if they're so inclined, it would be pretty hard to stop them even though they've agreed not to. So I'm very concerned about that whole voters list.

I'm very glad that I had this opportunity to make a few comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorne Coe: The issue that always comes to the forefront with this bill, and so many others from the government, is the lack of public consultation. Specifically, there's a need for a public referendum before a municipality changes to a ranked ballot system, and there's no requirement for an alternative public consultation—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to stop you.

Okay. Member—

Mrs. Gila Martow: A point of order: I was sharing my time. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You're sharing your time with—

Mrs. Gila Martow: The member from Whitby—Oshawa.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Whitby—Oshawa, yes. Is the House agreed? Agreed.

Okay, we'll carry on.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you. I find this especially concerning, but certainly consistent with others brought forward by the government. It has become such an expected pattern of behaviour. Real consultation with Ontarians should be a watchword, but this government has implemented so much of its strategy from a top-down rather than a bottom-up approach.

For the first time, in our last municipal election in the region of Durham, where I was a regional councillor, we elected our regional chairman. But before that happened, the question of electing or appointing our regional chair was first placed before the public on the ballot as a question. It was a referendum in its purest form, and in the end, it was determined that the population of Durham region wanted an election. They determined that it was the right thing to do.

Mitzie Hunter's private member's bill—that was in the House earlier—on ranked ballots required public consultation. So the question arises: Why is it omitted in this legislation?

It's also important to consider that many of the important details with ranked ballots are and will be buried in the regulations. In fact, sections of the legislation can be changed by regulation, despite having gone through the entire legislative process. Again, I find that unreasonable.

An overriding issue is the fact that under the proposed legislation, elected officials in their municipality will be making decisions upon the very system under which they're elected to office. This is simply wrong. As the member from Oxford has so rightly said, this creates a huge conflict of interest for municipal councils.

In 2015, the city of Toronto council passed a resolution recommending that the province not proceed with amending the Municipal Elections Act until public consultations and a referendum occurred. As Professor Patrice Dutil of Ryerson University so rightly stated, "No government has the moral right to alter the precious process of elections without the approval of the people." When faced with these opinions by highly respected people in institutions, the Liberal government appears simply to throw them all under the bus.

The campaign period is still lengthening and straining the capability of some private and public sector employees wishing to run for office.

In closing, I return to the ranked voting system. If we're going to embrace this change, let's do it the right way. Best outcomes are best based on robust consultation. Let's properly consult with key stakeholders before we move instead to a process that is driven from the top, not the bottom.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise in this House to take part in this debate to make some comments. I have to say, our member Percy Hatfield had an opportunity to speak to this bill earlier this week, and his focus—different from the focus of the two members who just spoke—was on the whole question of third-party advertising and third-party expression during an election.

I think it's entirely reasonable that there be some limits on third-party advertising. Certainly, what we've seen in the United States with the ruling on, I believe, Citizens United, which has given large corporations the ability to engage in very comprehensive, very broad advertising campaigns to shape the thinking in an election—those are the kinds of things that we don't want to have as part of the political culture here in Ontario. So I think it makes sense to look at the kind of restrictions that would be reasonable, practical and justifiable.

But Mr. Hatfield and I are very concerned that the way things are written in this bill with regard to third-party advertising poses the possibility of a substantial chill on freedom of speech. I've had the opportunity in the past to be active with the co-op housing movement here in Toronto, and I have to say, during the election campaigns in the 1980s and the 1990s, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto was an active participant in terms of getting out the message on the need to support social housing, non-profit housing and subsidized housing. They didn't shrink at all from putting signs up in co-ops, having meetings and putting out flyers to try to raise the profile of the issue.

As I understand it, from Mr. Hatfield's comments, that kind of activity could be dramatically restricted under the terms of this bill. We want civil society to have the opportunity to speak and educate people during an election. It appears that the line has been drawn in a way that's far too rigid for this society.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. It's the first time I stand in this place with you as Speaker, so congratulations. I'm sure you'll do a great job and will be a fantastic addition to the folks who control the tone of this place.

Just a couple of minutes to comment on the members from Whitby–Oshawa and Thornhill.

Ranked ballots seems to come up, and, “No consultation; we need a referendum.” When I ran for mayor in the newly amalgamated municipality of Brighton in 2000, it was the very first time the council of the day made the decision they were going to use vote-by-mail. It was one of the biggest turnouts we ever had. We didn't consult. We made a decision, and that happened: an over 80% voter turnout. And do you know what? Some people had some difficulties, I will admit, but today it's endorsed by a lot of other municipalities. They have the vote by phone, by Internet, and frankly, nobody's had a referendum. They abide by the rules.

When I talk about a referendum, it's interesting that the members of the opposition are really pushing that button. Well, I met with mayors as late as today and I asked them that question, some of the mayors: “Is this an issue?” Their answer to me—now, it wasn't all the mayors of Ontario—was, frankly, that it was an option; council would decide.

I also remember that election of 2000, just prior to that, at an AMO conference, when the Minister of

Municipal Affairs of the day told Toronto that they were going to amalgamate them, and told the rest of us municipalities in Ontario, “You'd better do it before we do it for you.” There was no referendum, Speaker. All of a sudden now, they seem—I'm not sure where they're coming from.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm just going to focus a little bit on the Liberal proposal to change the way elections are done in the province of Ontario.

Truthfully, I've been around for a while: 21 years I've had the honour of serving folks from Niagara and the Glanbrook and Upper Stoney Creek area. I've had a lot of conversations. Honest to God, I don't know if I can count on a single hand the number of real people who have said we really need to change the voting system in the province of Ontario. I hear it from the tinfoil-hat crowd. I'll hear it from the occasional political science professor. But otherwise, I just do not believe that there is a demand from average voters, real people, to say, “Toss out the system.”

In fact, I bet you there's demand in other countries that say, “They've got a great system in Canada. They have direct representation. You represent actual, real people. You're not on a list connected to cronies. Votes count equally in the province.” I think there are a lot of other places that would say, “We wish we had a parliamentary democracy that functions as well as Canada's.”

I don't know why we would want to become the kind of pizza Parliament we see in some European countries or some other nations that struggle to get ahead because they're paralyzed politically. I really don't believe this is the system. I don't see how a ranked ballot can measure strength of vote as well, how strongly you feel about your second and third choice. I know who I wanted to vote for federally. I had no second choice; I think they would take the country the wrong way. Why would you force me to do a second choice on that ballot? What would happen to my second choice? Would I be robbed of an equal voice in determining who Parliament would be, or a municipality?

I just do not believe it is a compelling issue that would have us change what has been a great system that has worked for our country for some now 149 years. For political hobbyists and the tinfoil-hat crowd? Strongly against it, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to respond to the comments that were made by the member for Whitby–Oshawa and the member for Thornhill.

Unlike many of the MPPs in this House, I come from a community that has enthusiastically endorsed the ranked ballot. My municipal council passed a resolution in June to notify the province that they supported the right of municipalities to decide to use a ranked ballot in the 2018 municipal election. So there's a lot of interest at the grassroots level in proceeding with a ranked ballot.

1710

The reservation that we have on this side of the House is about the other provisions in the bill, those provisions dealing with third-party advertising in particular. We are at a moment in time in this province where a spotlight has been shone on the influence of big money in the political process, and what kinds of policy or legislative change big money can buy, because of the campaign financing turmoil that we have seen connected with the Liberal Party.

The timing of this legislation does raise the question of whether it was introduced as an effort to deflect some of that attention away from the Liberals and focus back on the municipalities. But it seems that it was rushed through a little bit. The third-party advertising provisions, in fact, are modelled after the BC provisions that are in the midst of a Supreme Court challenge, based on what the impact will be of silencing small organizations who will no longer be able to express their opinion about public policy issues during election campaigns.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Thornhill to wrap up.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that it's very interesting how so many of the elected officials who are here in the House seem to interact with so many different people. We just heard that there is wide support for ranked balloting in some communities, whereas in other communities, to tell you the truth, most people aren't even aware of it.

I think it's really important for us, though, to get out of our—sometimes we're in those political bubbles. Among my friends, if I'm at a friend's house on a Saturday night, I know I have to force myself not to talk about politics, because the reality is that we're all so engaged here in the process and how elections work.

But outside of here, I would say the vast majority of people in the province of Ontario are not even aware that we have riding associations in our ridings. They're not aware of what the boundaries are of their own ridings. They're often very confused about who their representatives are. They aren't even aware of who their representatives are. They show up to vote for one person because when they drive to work, where their work is, the signs are all different names than where they live. They're very confused, and they complain about that.

They are very mixed-up in terms of what are federal issues, what are provincial issues and what are municipal issues. We all get phone calls all the time in our constituency offices about immigration problems and about garbage collection problems. I don't think I'm the only one receiving those calls.

I think that, pretty much with an electorate of that, if we get out of our little political bubble and away from our riding association executives and volunteers, most people don't really understand ranked balloting. But what they do understand is that they want elections to be fair and to be representative of what their viewpoints are.

My concern is that people want to feel comfortable with the process or they will not vote. So my issue is that we want to increase voter turnout, not decrease it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak a little bit about this bill that is meant to modernize the Municipal Elections Act in Ontario.

I think it was Winston Churchill who said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried from time to time." It went something along those lines. It's really a practice that goes back thousands of years to ancient Greeks. It has been through processes of modernization ever since, and I see absolutely no good reason to change that tradition now. Times change, different factors come into play, and we must be ever vigilant to ensure that we are keeping up with those changes.

Fair and free elections are one of the cornerstones of a modern democracy, and we must do what is necessary to make sure that the people have an equal and open opportunity to elect the representatives of their choice. In Athens, way back when, citizens were randomly selected to fill the government, administrative and judicial positions, much like we do today with jury duty. That's an interesting concept, but I'm not at the point of proposing this as an amendment for this bill, by absolutely no means.

They also had a large element of what we would call direct democracy. Every citizen could speak and vote on laws. If the Speaker thinks that she has a hard time keeping decorum in this chamber, imagine for a moment having to keep track and keep their thumb on ancient Athens, because when I was doing the research, I saw that that was definitely something that was completely out of control.

It's interesting to think about where we started down this democratic road, with every citizen having a vote in deciding the laws. But if it were replicated today, I would not have a vote, nor would the member for London West, or if you happen to be one of the million people who rent a home in the province of Ontario, you would also be out of luck. The same would apply if you were one of the millions of immigrants who make our province a better place for us all, because the citizenry of Athens did not include women. It didn't include slaves, it didn't include foreigners and it didn't include non-landowners. So, as good as Athenian democracy was, especially compared to some of the barbaric practices used in parts of the rest of the world for centuries later, it certainly wasn't perfect.

Times change. Our understanding of fairness develops and improves, and so it is our job to recognize the influences that are impacting elections and to change the rules to accommodate our modern understanding of fairness in elections. That is what I think we are all looking to do with this bill. It is an important task but I must say I'm deeply concerned about the rush that this government has put on this. They introduced it just last week, and we are almost through second reading already.

The people and the public we represent, those who this affects most deeply, need time to digest what is in this

bill. They need time to work out exactly what the impact of these 59 pages of text will mean. We need time to hear from them before making a decision on what is best for the interests of our local democracy.

The next municipal election is not until October 2018, so I really don't see any reason for this to be rushed. Why rush to get it through this Legislature so quickly? It's customary and courteous to take some time, but it's also sensible. We and the public need time to look beyond the headlines. We need to hear informed opinion and we need to consult with legal experts to fully appreciate the ramifications of this bill. But the government has decided, unfortunately, to ram it through.

Coincidentally, they are doing this as they are facing tough questions in this House of their own fundraising practices. One day they're setting fundraiser quotas for ministers, organizing big-ticket events to provide donors the opportunity to rub shoulders with the heads of government, and the next they're bringing forward bills to change the democratic process.

Speaker, not that long ago, they were raising \$2.5 million to \$3 million in just one evening, and now here we are a couple of weeks later, changing the rules for municipal elections. And now they desperately want to change the channel. Perhaps this bill fills a need for the government that goes beyond a desire to change municipal elections.

I mentioned earlier about changing the influences on our democratic structure. One of those is the impact of big money. Money certainly plays a big part in our elections—too big, quite frankly—and I support finding ways to lessen that impact. With this legislation, we need to support local democracy and get big money out of municipal elections, but the bill stops short of banning corporate and union donations. Instead, it provides the option to municipalities. I'm not sure why this government doesn't believe that rules shouldn't apply straight across the province.

Bill 181 also provides for limitations on third-party advertising in campaigns. On the surface, this appears to be a good move. I think there is a place for limits on activity of third parties during elections. It's been done at the federal level and in other jurisdictions.

1720

But we have some concerns about what the scope of the third-party provisions are in Bill 181. Where these provisions exist elsewhere, they generally only prohibit a demonstration of support or opposition to a particular candidate or party, and this extends to situations where the candidate or party isn't named. But Bill 181 goes further than that. It appears to say that all advertising related to an election campaign is prohibited. This includes advertising about a particular interest.

What this means is that an individual or group cannot campaign in support of public transit, for example. That, I believe, is a serious flaw in this legislation. As I understand it, this bill would only allow those who can make a donation to spend money on a municipal election, so no NGOs, charities or community groups would be

allowed to campaign on the issues that they feel would be important to the public. Yes, they can campaign on issues outside of the election period, which would now be limited to the period between May and October, but I think we all know that at that time, many of the public need to hear about debate on issues. The most important time for that to be happening is during an election campaign.

Also, in contrast to other jurisdictions, Bill 181 doesn't set a low threshold for exemption from third-party advertising provisions. The Canada Elections Act, for example, sets a lower threshold of \$500. What the provisions of Bill 181 mean is that if you spend \$10, you are considered to be a third party and subject to all of the rules that go with that. As candidates—which in this House, we have all been—we know the extensive rules when it comes to our finances during election campaigns. A measly \$10 would apply to all of the same rules that we would have to abide by.

One exception to this is in British Columbia, where the Liberal government in that province brought in legislation to regulate all third-party advertising in local elections, including zero-cost advertising. The impact of that decision has been felt throughout smaller organizations who work in the public interest. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, along with Pembina and BC Health Coalition, have commented on the chilling effect that the legislation has on smaller organizations. The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association is mounting a constitutional challenge to the law.

While there is a lot to support in this bill, I worry about the impact that this will have, as written, on the public's ability to freely express themselves in the context of future municipal elections. That's why we need to take a bit of time on this bill, and that's why I really don't understand why the government finds it necessary to rush it through second reading at this time. I think that with further consultation, we would be able to make sure that we get it right, especially in the context of the third-party advertising, where we could be putting somebody unnecessarily into hot water.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't think I've had a chance to speak while you have been in the chair. Congratulations on your new role. The outfit looks fantastic. I hope it was customized to your requirements, because it's mostly been men in the chair lately. It's wonderful to see you in there.

I'm happy to say a few words about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I think we all know what's behind this. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing reviews the act following each municipal election to ensure that it meets the changing needs of Ontarians. There were 3,400 submissions about how the act can be improved. This is a good thing.

I wanted to talk a little bit about another feature of the bill that may not get fully discussed here, and that's around the accessibility provisions. The proposed

changes, as I understand it, would require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities, and all municipalities would need to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day. That's all good.

I'm a little surprised that that obligation isn't already there under the accessibility legislation we have in our province. I know from previous work I've done on a voluntary basis and for the province that many persons with disabilities don't bother to vote because it is too difficult for them—either they have physical limitations or sensory limitations. My husband is a paraplegic in a wheelchair; when he went to vote one year, before a ramp was at the school where we vote, he had to knock on doors that were locked. It was really difficult for him to vote. He eventually did, so he was glad, but not without a lot of perseverance and persistence.

I think accessibility is important. It's part of our democratic system, and the more accessible you make voting, the better.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I thought my colleague was getting up, but that's fine. I'm up now, and that's okay.

I'd like to take a couple of minutes on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. Like a lot of the members in the chamber, I came here a long time ago now. It seems like a long time ago now. I was in municipal politics as well. I remember my very first campaign, out door-knocking. They thought it was kind of novel at the time: I had signs for my campaign, and the person I was running against went out and got signs, too. I'm talking a long time ago now; more than you think. I know you wouldn't think that, Madam Speaker, but it was a number of years ago.

Anyway, the campaigns down home—when I say “home,” I mean Lambton county, and the township of Enniskillen was the municipality I represented on council for a number years, then on to the hospital board to spend some time there. I was one with a unique experience; I was also a returning officer for a number of elections, too, as well for provincial elections. So I had the opportunity to both have my name on the ballot and vote for myself, and then a number of years later I had the opportunity to administer provincial elections. I enjoyed that very much and never dreamt I'd someday be here.

That's how, through a strange, circuitous path, I ended up here in the House. I enjoy it every day, and I look forward to working with my colleagues here. It's been an experience every day, and I look forward to the rest of the debate as the day goes forward to hear about municipal elections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to offer some thoughts on the remarks that were given to us today by the member for Hamilton Mountain—excellent remarks, may I add.

I was struck when she talked about how in Athenian democracy the citizenry didn't include women, and I was reminded that it was only in 1929 in Canada that women were recognized as being eligible to sit in the Senate and to vote, which is why we now recognize Persons Day.

She made some very important comments. One of the most troubling aspects of Bill 181 is the fact that it links the right to promote an issue to the right to make a campaign contribution. Therefore, while it holds out the option to municipalities to ban corporate and union donations, the flipside of that is that if they do introduce that ban, then corporations and organizations are no longer able to promote an issue. Therefore, small organizations, community-based organizations that want to advocate on issues would be silenced if there is a municipality that has decided to ban corporate and union donations. So it will be an interesting discussion around municipal tables as they look at whether they should ban corporate and union donations, given the impact of that decision on freedom of speech, on the right of community-based organizations to talk about the issues that are important to them during the campaign period.

1730

Speaker, this is a very mixed bag that we have before us in Bill 181. There are some good things, but there are some very problematic aspects.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to rise to offer some comments on Bill 181 and the remarks from the member from Hamilton Mountain and the others.

Madam Speaker, I had a career of over 20 years in municipal politics. I ran in many municipal elections, and I think I know the rules, as they stand now, inside out. I also know that over that period, I consistently heard from residents, from ratepayer groups and others that we desperately need some reforms. We need campaign finance reform.

I'm very proud that in the city of Toronto, we did ban corporate and union donations, and I believe every municipality in this province should have the right to do so, if they so choose, after they debate it at their council.

I was a member of Toronto council when council strongly voted in favour of ranked ballots, as did I. Something changed after the last municipal election—a bit of a flip-flop there. Perhaps some of my former colleagues looked at the results of the latest election and got worried about what ranked ballots might mean to them. But I do know that within my community, there is very strong support for ranked ballots.

But that doesn't mean that other municipalities are forced to adopt that system. This bill precisely allows for municipalities, after a public process, to have that choice and make their own decision.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services made an excellent point about this bill putting in place stronger rules around making sure that our places of voting are accessible to all. I'm sure we have all faced, whether at the municipal level or provincial level, challenges with voting places not being accessible. That is a very important reform here, and I urge all members of the House to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member from Hamilton Mountain to wrap up.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the member from Sarnia–Lambton, the member from London West and the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. You all made some really good points and reasons why there are a lot of good things about this bill.

The minister talked about the disability portion of this bill and the importance of what that means. But we shouldn't just have locations that are accessible. We should have voting systems that are accessible for people with disabilities also. It's something that we should be looking to, and we should be pushing that bar. In my city of Hamilton, during municipal elections, there are provisions and machines set up for accessibility, for people with disabilities, and I'm very proud of that for my city. But I think it's something that we need to have provincially and federally as well, because there are definitely lots of reasons that stop folks from getting out to vote, and we need to make sure that it's as accessible as possible.

Our concerns about this bill are, once again, about the third-party advertising and how they're pulling small organizations in on that. Not having the lower bar on the amounts of dollars, of who that affects, is a serious problem. Canada has a \$500 limit. Not putting any limit puts someone literally at risk for as little as \$10, or less, for making photocopies. They would be on the hook for as much responsibility as we, as candidates, would be. We know what a process that is. To put somebody through that for that very small provision of, say, a photocopy, I think, is concerning.

Thank you so much for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Brampton–Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Madam Speaker, I have a point of order. I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those who agree? Do we agree? Agreed.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I move that, on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag at 3:15 p.m.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Wait.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can she read it again? I didn't hear it.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I move that, on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag at 3:15 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I believe the member for Brampton–Springdale, Ms. Malhi, is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Ms. Malhi has moved that on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag. Do we agree? Agreed. Great. I hear “agreed.” Carried.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I hear a point of order from the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Just more out of a learning process, because I am still learning how things work here, but I thought we did unanimous consent—by the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—that we will fly the Sikh flag tomorrow, Friday, and Monday all day. It seems kind of like a bit of confusion.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I received the notice and it is correct.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: In this debate, I think there have been a lot of very valid points from many members, like the member from Sarnia there. He has served on local council. The Minister of Agriculture served locally in Peterborough and he has served here.

But I don't see anybody from Elections Ontario here. I'm really wondering if they're listening at all to some of the good points that the members are putting forward. I think it would really help in making this a better bill and making the execution of the bill better. I'm glad the members are putting forth some very valid points. In fact, I can't even remember, in my many years here, ever getting a call from Elections Ontario, saying, “Do you have any ideas on how we can make an election better?” I think there are many things they can do, and I know this bill talks about some changes. I'm just going to talk about some practical things first.

One of the biggest hindrances to better voter turnout in the province is a very simple thing, and do you know what it is? It's that ridiculous voter card. That voter card comes in the mail with real estate cards, fitness cards, pizza cards, everything under the sun. So people get that card. That card gets lost, gets thrown in the blue box, gets misplaced. People panic, because without that card, you are going to go through hell and back to get on that voters list. They're usually intimidated by the process. They don't even know where to go to get on the voters list, because they don't have that stupid ID card.

Then when you get the ID card—I don't know if you've seen it. I know in the last provincial election, the printing on the voter ID card was so small that you needed a magnifying glass to see where you would vote. It was packed with information. You can imagine a senior trying to say, “Well, I got my voter ID card. Where do I vote?” And then they have about 10 dates, in terms of advance polling stations.

The confusion that that card causes really suppresses voter turnout, yet they keep sending out that card—small print; people throw it out. Have they ever done an evaluation: Is that card really effective? Maybe we should look at replacing that card with a different method. No, we still send out those cards. They go into the blue box all the time. If you go into an apartment building, you'll see. Along with campaign literature, people at the apartment building or condo go to the box and throw all that stuff out with the pizza cards and free hamburger cards. That's one thing that has got to change. At least have writing that's legible and not minuscule for people on those cards.

1740

In terms of accessibility, we now have these rules about polling stations having to be accessible, which is great. The problem is they get these stations that are accessible, but they're miles away from where the people live. So the seniors, the people that have trouble walking—yes, the polling station is accessible, but try and get to it. You're going to have to walk down to the bus, which comes every whatever, 10, 15 or 20 minutes. You're going to have to try and find this polling station, which is way out of your neighbourhood, yet they say, "It's accessible. We made the polling station accessible." Try and get to the polling station. Try to find the polling station.

Then the other thing, in terms of accessibility and the polling station, is that it is very, very difficult for people who are sick at home. I've been involved in a couple hundred elections, municipally, federally and provincially. You try and get a proxy vote for a sick person who is disabled at home. You basically have to spend a whole day to get one person that desperately wants to vote—they can't get out of their bed or wheelchair—and the proxy system is so impossible that it denies many disabled people, elderly people the right to vote. It is a total mess, this proxy system, and it deprives people who are unable to vote the ability to vote. It's voter suppression again. "Sorry, you're at home sick, we don't need you to vote. You have to hire a Bay Street lawyer to get on the voters list."

Then the other thing, which is really maddening if you talk to your voters—and I don't care whether it's Peterborough or Mississauga; they should pay attention because the same things happen in Peterborough as they do in Mississauga—is in terms of the polling stations. The municipal polling stations are in one building, then the federal election comes along and it's in another building. Then the municipal election comes along, the polling station changes again. God forbid they should ever get together, the three levels of government, and say, "Listen, we're going to have standardized polling stations so that people will remember"—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: —yes, that's right, to go vote. Because every election, I see people say:

"Well I voted at the school last time."

"Oh, no, that was provincial, now it's federal. You've got to go around the corner to the warehouse to vote."

"Well, why wouldn't you vote at the school again?"

"Well, they changed it."

They don't talk to each other. The federal, municipal, provincial don't talk to each other about how to make places accessible and available to people. They don't care about those things. Those are things that shouldn't be fixed because they know it all at Elections Ontario, at Elections Canada, municipal elections. They know it all. They never talk to the people who are trying to find out, "Where do I vote? I voted here just two months ago at the provincial election. I went there, and there was nobody." "Yes, because now it's federal. You've got to go up the street."

In terms of voter turnout, there is no magical way of increasing voter turnout. You can have ranked ballots. You can have proportional representation. You can devise all these wonderful schemes that seem to work in Norway, but do they work in Toronto or in Peterborough? Well, ask the people in Peterborough. Nobody ever talks to people in Peterborough. Will that increase voter turnout? I basically say no. Voter turnout has nothing to do with the type of ballot and proportional representation.

I remember we had this whole debate here for two years. I think Mr. Tabuns remembers that. Nobody could figure out what the heck we were talking about for a year. We just couldn't get people interested. We hired people. We had town hall meetings.

What gets people to come out to elections is if there are good candidates that communicate with the residents and that have good issues, and where there's something at stake. Then they come out in droves. If you've got no issues, poor candidates, people say, "Well, what's the use of voting? I don't know anything about this election."

Then they go in to vote. Have you seen a municipal election ballot lately? In Toronto, sometimes there are maybe 30, 40, 50 trustees listed in there: the French Catholic, the French public, the public, you know, all across the board. So they say, "Who do I vote for, for trustee?" You know what they do? They don't vote for any, because they say, "I don't know. This person could be a whack job. I'm not going to vote for him or her."

Then they've got a whole list of councillors. In some ridings, there may be 20 or 30 running for one position. How do they know who to vote for? You know what they do? They usually vote for the first one on the list or a name that sounds—you know, they'll see the name "Kennedy." "Okay, I'll vote for Kennedy." That's confusing. It's intimidating.

But if you do have an interesting mayoralty race, like we had in Toronto—we had a high voter turnout. If you have a good councillors race, that's what brings out the voter turnout.

God help you if it rains or it's cold. People find it very difficult to get out on cold and rainy days, because they have to go across the city, in the cold and rain, to find this mythical polling station that has been changed by each level of government, to look at a list of about 50 people running for positions they know nothing about. That is what affects voter turnout.

I wish someone in Elections Ontario would show up at Queen's Park one day and maybe listen to us for a change.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: It was very interesting to hear the member opposite just speaking about access to voting and how difficult it is for people to get their voter card. It gets lost in all the flyers, I believe he was saying; they don't know where to vote. It's very confusing.

Certainly, when I look at the title of this bill, the modernization part of it—as I said before, when I speak to people in my community, they hear the word “modernization” and they think “digital,” they think “computers,” they think “electronic.” They think, “Oh, my God, finally somebody's doing something so I don't have to get a piece of paper in the mail; I don't have to even go somewhere and stand in line”—because if there's one thing that people do not like, it's having to stand in line—and that they can just vote from their computers.

Yes, we now have electronic voting systems with the machines. Municipally, Vaughan does that. Markham, which is the other half of my riding, has electronic voting from your computer that you sign up for if you want. Vaughan has these very fancy ballots that are electronic and have to go into a machine. Because those ballots are so expensive, they never order enough of them. What they do is they have a system where the clerk waits for a phone call to bring more of these special ballots for these special machines to where they're needed. They have no way of guessing how many are going to be needed, because there are so many new communities and they are not even sure how many people are going to be voting. People are coming and registering at the time.

People tell stories of standing around for an hour, waiting for the clerk to come or to send somebody to bring enough of these extra ballots. How many people go home? My guess is that probably about 80% or 90% of the people, once half an hour goes by, say, “Goodbye. I have kids at home.” Or they wait, and then they get home, and their spouse, who was going to come after watching the kids, says, “Too late for me. The polls are closed.”

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: If I could indulge the House to start off with, my brother David is at home watching. Hey, big brother.

Thank you to the member from Eglinton—Lawrence and his passion when he talks about our electoral process, because he raises some good issues, right? The problem is, how are we getting people to vote? But unfortunately, that's not what is in this bill. What is in this bill, however, are concerns. I know he was listening when I gave my portion of the speech talking about third parties—and the concerns of not having the low threshold on those people to be able to advertise, whether it be for the bus system or whatever process they're putting out. For the very minimal cost of making some photocopies—it could cost \$5 to \$10—now they have to be responsible to put in a full financial statement to the

electoral office. As we all know as elected officials, that is a huge, huge process that just doesn't make sense for someone who wants to lobby or talk about their bus system during an election or talk about a train.

1750

We've seen those campaigns happen here in Toronto and across the province. They happen for several reasons. People could be wanting to talk about a specific issue in their community. They won't have the ability to do that; their hands will be tied. I think that's concerning because that's especially the time when they want to talk about important issues that matter to them. Our democracy is built on freedom of speech and having that opportunity to speak out when something in your community is just not the way you'd like to see it. I think it would be a really big piece to miss when debating this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank the member from Eglinton. He took a bit of a deviation from the bill, and, yes, he might not have talked a lot about the content of the bill, but he also raised some good points when it comes to the actual process.

On the same note, I want to talk about what elections are like in rural Ontario. We don't have 50-storey high-rises with a poll in the lobby. We have a poll maybe at a school or maybe at a hospital. Back a few years ago, because of the central location where I lived—it was a place where people could recognize where we lived because of our business—we opened our house to voting for a municipal election.

Hon. Jeff Leal: How many votes did you get?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, I was able to vote. I didn't have to go very far. I mean, that was the advantage. I only voted once.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Who did you vote for?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, it was a long time ago.

Speaker, the point I'm trying to make is that people sometimes have to drive five or 10 kilometres. Do you know what's really strange, especially when you're talking about polls? There's this imaginary line in the middle of a road. My neighbour across the street goes up to the church, 500 metres down the road. I live on the other side of the road, and I've got to drive five kilometres, or 10 kilometres, to get to a polling station. With today's technology, you would think it really didn't matter where I voted. I think we have the technology there.

So in rural Ontario—what the member from Eglinton talked about—it's aggravated even more. He's right. We have different polling stations, depending on the level of government that we're electing. I get confused. “You just had one—it was there. That's probably where I'm going to vote,” but that's not really what happens. So thank you for bringing that out.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I have a couple of minutes just to make a couple of comments about Bill 181.

I want to come to the issue around the ranked vote, because one person, one vote is the fundamental democratic process. I think that to dismiss it in the way that is proposed by this bill does not give service or recognition to how important it is.

I also think that part of that comes back to the municipality. While I have never held municipal-level office, obviously, I've taken an interest in it. People who want to be candidates in the municipalities have sometimes called me for advice. I find that those who do call are frequently people that have very little understanding of the workings of the municipal government. They have one idea in mind that they would like to change, but no idea how that process works. Frankly, I find this bill almost premature. Certainly, I agree with the need to upgrade the technology, but "one person, one vote" is our fundamental right. We don't want to jeopardize this. I would suggest that the notion that it can be done through one public meeting is an extreme affront to the fundamental system that we have: one member, one vote.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence to wrap up.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her helpful comments; the member from Hamilton Mountain, who made an excellent point about how NGOs and small organizations should be allowed to be involved in elections; and the member from Northumberland, who talked about the same thing I was talking about, accessibility to vote.

You've got people forced to go miles. Then they don't have that stupid ID card that drives people crazy. They

think they can't vote because they know that when they go to the polling station and say, "I lost my ID card," they put them through the third degree and ask them to get out their birth certificate and their passport. They intimidate a lot of the older Canadians and they intimidate a lot of new Canadians with this third degree they give them because they lost that stupid voter card, which they lost because it was thrown away with all the pizza flyers in the mail.

I think there's a lot of good in this bill and there's a lot that needs improvement, too. But I always say: Do your fundamentals right. You can build these fancy new voting schemes and you can build all kinds of new processes, but the basic rule is that you've got to allow people to exercise their democratic right. That doesn't happen if the polling stations change with the weather every election and they can't find the polling station and they can't get on the voters list. If they're sick at home, you need a Bay Street lawyer to get them to vote with a proxy.

That is what's so irritating about our present electoral system. It is not user-friendly. It caters to people who are really involved or people who get really agitated. But your regular people who just want to vote are given a hard time. I've seen it election after election, federal, provincial and municipal—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing it's almost 6 p.m., I'm going to adjourn the House until Monday, April 18, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille 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
Oraziotti, 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 Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
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**

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
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

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Lisa Gretzky, Ann Hoggarth
Harinder Malhi, Jim McDonell
Eleanor McMahan, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
Robert Bailey, Wayne Gates
Monte Kwinter, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**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**

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jack MacLaren
Granville Anderson, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahan, 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

Continued from back cover

Special-needs students

Ms. Lisa MacLeod	8674
Hon. Liz Sandals	8674
Mr. Bill Walker	8674

Executive compensation

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	8675
Hon. Brad Duguid	8675
Hon. Deborah Matthews	8675

Student assistance

Mr. Granville Anderson	8675
Hon. Reza Moridi	8675

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

**Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, 2016, Bill 100,
Mr. Coteau / Loi de 2016 sur le soutien aux sentiers
de l'Ontario, projet de loi 100, M. Coteau**

Second reading agreed to	8677
--------------------------------	------

Visitor

Ms. Harinder Malhi	8677
--------------------------	------

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS**

Mrs. Gila Martow	8677
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	8677

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Special-needs students

Mr. Ernie Hardeman	8677
--------------------------	------

Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame

Mr. Taras Natyshak	8677
--------------------------	------

Reading Circle

Ms. Soo Wong	8678
--------------------	------

Farm safety

Mr. Jim McDonell	8678
------------------------	------

Child Development Centre run

Ms. Sophie Kiwala	8678
-------------------------	------

Tel Aviv

Mrs. Gila Martow	8679
------------------------	------

Vaisakhi

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	8679
-------------------------	------

Eglinton Crosstown LRT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti	8679
--------------------------------	------

Torn Memories of Nanking

Mr. Bob Delaney	8679
-----------------------	------

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act
(Strengthening Retirement Security for Ontarians),
2016, Bill 186, Ms. Hunter / Loi de 2016 sur le
Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario
(sécuriser la retraite en Ontario), projet de loi 186,
Mme Hunter**

First reading agreed to	8680
Hon. Mitzie Hunter	8680

MOTIONS

Nishan Sahib flag

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	8680
Motion agreed to	8680

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Health care funding

Mrs. Gila Martow	8680
------------------------	------

Employment standards

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	8680
------------------------	------

Men's health

Mr. Arthur Potts	8681
------------------------	------

Special-needs students

Mr. Jim McDonell	8681
------------------------	------

Parental recognition

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	8681
------------------------	------

Sexual violence and harassment

Ms. Daiene Vernile	8682
--------------------------	------

Health care funding

Mr. Jim McDonell	8682
------------------------	------

Privatization of public assets

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	8682
------------------------	------

Child care

Mr. Arthur Potts	8682
------------------------	------

Special-needs students

Mrs. Gila Martow	8683
------------------------	------

**Special-needs students / Élèves ayant des besoins
particuliers**

Mme France Gélinas	8683
--------------------------	------

Men's health

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris	8683
--------------------------------	------

Special-needs students

Ms. Laurie Scott	8683
------------------------	------

Yad Vashem

Mr. Monte Kwinter	8684
-------------------------	------

Mrs. Gila Martow	8685
------------------------	------

Mr. Peter Tabuns	8686
------------------------	------

Sign-language interpretation

Hon. Helena Jaczek	8686
--------------------------	------

Motion agreed to	8687
------------------------	------

Visitors

Mr. Granville Anderson 8687

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS

Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), 2016, Bill 185, Mr. Paul Miller / Loi de 2016 modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires (Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale), projet de loi 185, M. Paul Miller

Mr. Paul Miller 8687
Hon. Helena Jaczek 8689
Mr. Randy Pettapiece 8689
Ms. Peggy Sattler 8690
Mr. Arthur Potts 8691
Mrs. Julia Munro 8692
Ms. Cheri DiNovo 8692
Mr. Lorne Coe 8693
Hon. James J. Bradley 8693
Mr. Paul Miller 8694

Special-needs students / Élèves ayant des besoins particuliers

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky 8694
Hon. Liz Sandals 8696
Mr. Todd Smith 8698
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong 8699
Mr. Steve Clark 8699
Ms. Peggy Sattler 8700
Mme France Gélinas 8700
Mr. Tim Hudak 8701
Mr. Granville Anderson 8701
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky 8701

Capping Ontario's Debt Act, 2016, Bill 168, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2016 sur le plafonnement de la dette de l'Ontario, projet de loi 168, M. McNaughton

Mr. Monte McNaughton 8702
Mr. Peter Tabuns 8703
Mr. Bob Delaney 8704
Mr. Michael Harris 8705
Mr. John Vanthof 8706
Ms. Ann Hoggarth 8707
Mr. Tim Hudak 8707
Hon. James J. Bradley 8707
Mr. Ted Arnott 8708
Mr. Monte McNaughton 8709

Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), 2016, Bill 185, Mr. Paul Miller / Loi de 2016 modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des

Services sociaux et communautaires (Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale), projet de loi 185, M. Paul Miller

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong) 8709

Special-needs students

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong) 8709

Capping Ontario's Debt Act, 2016, Bill 168,

Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2016 sur le plafonnement
de la dette de l'Ontario, projet de loi 168,
M. McNaughton

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong) 8709

Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), 2016, Bill 185, Mr. Paul Miller / Loi de 2016 modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires (Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale), projet de loi 185, M. Paul Miller

Second reading agreed to 8710

Special-needs students

Motion negated 8710

Capping Ontario's Debt Act, 2016, Bill 168,

Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2016 sur le plafonnement
de la dette de l'Ontario, projet de loi 168,
M. McNaughton

Second reading negated 8711

Private members' public business

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong) 8711

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016, Bill 181, Mr. McMeekin / Loi de 2016 sur la modernisation des élections municipales, projet de loi 181, M. McMeekin

Mrs. Gila Martow 8711
Mr. Lorne Coe 8712
Mr. Peter Tabuns 8712
Mr. Lou Rinaldi 8713
Mr. Tim Hudak 8713
Ms. Peggy Sattler 8713
Mrs. Gila Martow 8714
Miss Monique Taylor 8714
Hon. Tracy MacCharles 8715
Mr. Robert Bailey 8716
Ms. Peggy Sattler 8716
Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn 8716
Miss Monique Taylor 8717
Mr. Mike Colle 8717
Mrs. Gila Martow 8719
Miss Monique Taylor 8719
Mr. Lou Rinaldi 8719
Mrs. Julia Munro 8719
Mr. Mike Colle 8720
Second reading debate deemed adjourned 8720

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 14 April 2016 / Jeudi 14 avril 2016

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, 2016, Bill 100, Mr. Coteau / Loi de 2016 sur le soutien aux sentiers de l'Ontario, projet de loi 100, M. Coteau

Mr. John Yakabuski	8655
Ms. Cindy Forster	8656
Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	8656
Mrs. Gila Martow.....	8657
Mme France Gélinas	8657
Mr. John Yakabuski	8657
Mr. Grant Crack	8658
Vote deferred.....	8659

Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016, Bill 156, Mr. Orazietti / Loi de 2016 modifiant des lois concernant les services financiers de rechange, projet de loi 156, M. Orazietti

Hon. David Orazietti	8659
Mr. Chris Ballard	8662
Ms. Cindy Forster	8663
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	8665

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mrs. Gila Martow.....	8665
Hon. Jeff Leal.....	8665
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	8665
Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn	8665
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	8665
Ms. Soo Wong.....	8665
Mr. Jim Wilson	8665
Hon. Michael Coteau	8665
Mrs. Julia Munro.....	8665
Mrs. Amrit Mangat	8665
Mr. Steve Clark	8665
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	8665
Mr. Monte Kwinter	8665
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	8665
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	8665
Hon. David Zimmer	8665
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	8665
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	8665
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	8665
Mr. Robert Bailey	8666
Mr. Todd Smith.....	8666

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn	8666
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	8666

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Special-needs students

Mr. Patrick Brown.....	8666
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	8666
Mr. Todd Smith.....	8666
Hon. Liz Sandals	8666
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	8667

Special-needs students

Mr. Steve Clark	8667
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	8667
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	8667
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	8668
Hon. Liz Sandals	8668

Special-needs students

Ms. Andrea Horwath	8668
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	8668

Fundraising

Ms. Andrea Horwath	8669
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	8669
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	8670

Special-needs students

Mr. Robert Bailey.....	8670
Hon. Liz Sandals	8670
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	8670

Special-needs students

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	8671
Hon. Liz Sandals	8671

Aboriginal programs and services

Mr. Grant Crack	8671
Hon. Tracy MacCharles	8671
Hon. Eric Hoskins	8672

Special-needs students

Mrs. Julia Munro	8672
Hon. Liz Sandals	8672
Mr. Randy Pettapiece	8672

Autism treatment

Miss Monique Taylor	8672
Hon. Deborah Matthews	8673

Ontario budget

Mr. Yvan Baker.....	8673
Hon. Charles Sousa	8673

Continued on inside back cover